# Little Rag Doll

by

ETHEL CALVERT PHILLIPS

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# LITTLE RAG DOLL

*By Ethel Calvert Phillips*

THIS is the story of a Little Rag Doll who ran away from home because Harriet Ann didn't know how to treat a doll, and didn't even give her a name. So the Little Rag Doll called herself Dilly and set out to find a happier home. In the huckleberry patch shabby little Dilly met a fairy, Mrs. Thimbletop, who longed to go housekeeping. So gay Mrs. Thimbletop and gentle Dilly walked off and came at last to a little girl's playhouse, nicely furnished and empty, except for a plump cat, Grandma Reddy. The three agreed to go to housekeeping.

There are eighty pictures, four in color, by Lois Lenski.

# LITTLE RAG DOLL

It was the first time she had stepped
forth into the big world (*page* 33)

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BY

ETHEL CALVERT PHILLIPS

*With illustrations by*

LOIS LENSKI

Boston and New York

HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY

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1930

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I give to you this book, dear Gladys Ware,
In memory of the memories we share.
The classroom where we met, the things we've done,
The joys and sorrows of the years now gone,
Music and books and art and friendship rare,
We'll share them to the end, dear Gladys Ware.

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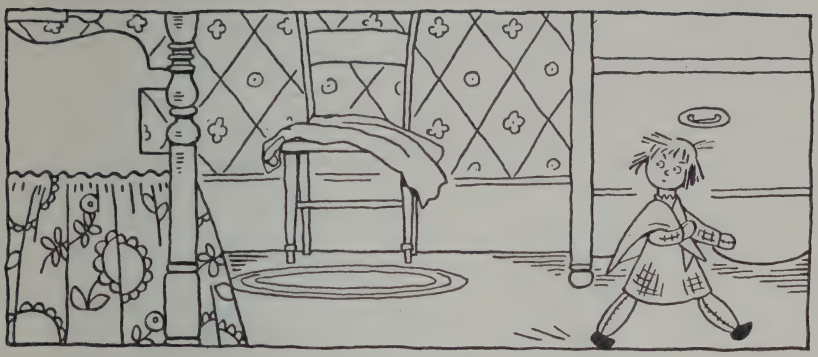


# LITTLE RAG DOLL

## CHAPTER I

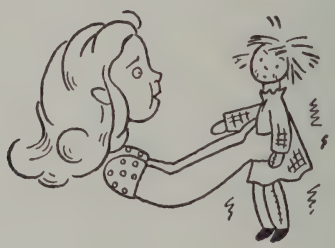
### THE LITTLE RAG DOLL

THE Little Rag Doll hung upside down from the bedpost and gazed at the floor with her wistful round blue eyes.

The Little Rag Doll was tired of hanging from the bedpost. She had been there since early afternoon, when Harriet Ann, the little girl she lived with, had tied her by one foot, scolding and shaking her all the while.

'You are a bad, bad girl,' Harriet Ann had said, as she twitched the ribbon from the Little Rag

Doll's waist, bound it to one ankle, and knotted the other end round the pineapple post of Harriet Ann's mother's dark, shining bed. 'You have been eating jam again without leave. Your mouth is sticky and so is your dress. Shame on you! Now, stay here!'



And Harriet Ann had given the Little Rag Doll a push that quite took her breath away and that set her to swinging and swaying until the whole room whirled round and round and the ceiling and the floor changed places several times.

The startled Little Rag Doll had wanted to call out, 'Why, that is what *you* did yesterday — ate the jam without leave. Your mother said so. I heard her talking to you. I heard it all.'

But by the time the room had stopped whirling

and the Little Rag Doll felt she could speak, Harriet Ann had run out of doors to play. So there was nothing left for the Little Rag Doll to do but to hang from the bedpost and stare at the floor and think.

The Little Rag Doll thought and thought. She was a good little dolly, with a sweet temper and a kind heart, and no matter how rough was Harriet Ann nor what strange things she might do, the Little Rag Doll never grew angry nor cross.

But now she was thinking things over, and thinking so hard that sometimes she talked right out loud.

'Harriet Ann knows I haven't been in the jam,' thought she. 'I am not sticky a bit. It doesn't seem fair to tie me here by one foot, just for nothing at all. I feel so dizzy and queer, as if all my cotton were rushing down into my head.'

The Little Rag Doll winked her blue eyes to keep from crying and gave a little sniff.

'I don't believe all little girls are like Harriet Ann,' she went on. 'I don't believe they all treat their dolls so. I know they don't. There was that

little girl named Dilly who came to visit Harriet Ann. She held me on her lap and petted me too. She rocked me and took me out for a walk. She even let me sleep beside her in her bed at night and she kissed me good-bye when she went away.'

Now the Little Rag Doll smiled sweetly and showed a dimple in her cheek at the very thought of the pleasant little visitor who had been so kind to her.

But soon she shook her head again sadly at Harriet Ann's strange ways.

'She has never given me a name,' said the Little Rag Doll in a surprised voice. 'Just think of that! Every one has a name. Even a cat. But Harriet Ann calls me "she" or "it" or "my old doll." That isn't polite, I am sure. I must say, though, that she calls me "Dolly" when she is sick in bed. But she always drags me by one arm, bumping and thumping me over the floor as like as not. She has been known to drop me over the banisters. She often leaves me out on the porch all night, and once I stayed a whole day on the front path in the rain.

You wouldn't believe all the strange things that Harriet Ann has done to me.'

Here the Little Rag Doll was mistaken. You had only to look at her to know that she had led a very hard life indeed.

She had been a pretty doll to begin with, but now, oh, dear! she was more battered and bedraggled than words can tell. Her gentle blue eyes wore an anxious look as if she didn't know what might happen to her next. Her mouth was sweet, but her lips were very pale and she had lost her pretty pink cheeks, all of which came, of course, from lying out in the rain. Her hair was in a sad state. It stood out every whichway and there was not a bit of curl left in it. It had been a pretty yellow wig

when new and the Little Rag Doll had been proud of it. For it isn't often that a rag doll has real hair. But now the poor dolly only sighed when she thought of it. For it hadn't known comb nor brush for weeks and weeks. That was plain to be seen.

As for her dress it was rumpled and mussed. The button was off and its place taken by a pin. Worse still, it was not very clean. And this fretted the poor Little Rag Doll most of all.

So you see she had many cares on her mind as she hung from the bedpost, cares enough to worry any one of her size or even larger, I am sure.

But suddenly a bright thought popped into her head.

'Why, I declare,' said the Little Rag Doll out loud, 'I shan't stay here. I'll run away.'

The moment the words were out of her mouth she was frightened. She looked round to see if any one had heard. But the more she thought of it the better she liked the idea. And presently she gave a sharp little nod.

'I will go,' said she. 'It won't be mean to Harriet

Ann. She will never miss me, I know. The truth is she isn't fitted to own a doll. She would rather run and race and climb fences and play ball. She has never taken any care of me at all. I'll go.'

A jerk and a pull, and down on the floor fell the Little Rag Doll. She was on her feet in a twinkling, looking about the room.

'It may be chilly out-of-doors,' said she wisely. 'I haven't the sign of a coat or a cape and I never have owned a hat. But what's this?'

From the floor beneath the dresser the Little Rag Doll picked up a pretty pink handkerchief neatly folded into a square. It belonged to Harriet Ann's mother. Harriet Ann had whisked it off the dresser as she rushed out of the room.

'Just the thing,' said the Little Rag Doll happily as she shook out the handkerchief and made it into a shawl. 'It is very pretty, and perhaps becoming, too, for I used to think pink was my color once upon a time. Now I will be off, and I hope with all my heart that Harriet Ann is down at the brook and will stay there until I am well on my way.'

Softly the Little Rag Doll stole out of the room and down the hall. She peeped through the banisters. There was no one in sight. So she set off down the stairs, rolling herself step by step, and very thankful that the stair carpet was so soft and thick.

'The stairs are clean too, thanks to Annie,' she thought happily as she bumped along. 'I shouldn't like to dirty my new pink shawl.'

Annie was the maid and a good friend to the Little Rag Doll. She had brought her in from the garden only last night when Harriet Ann had left the Little Rag Doll in the middle of the path where she might be stepped on as easily as not.

At the foot of the stairs the dolly lay still to fetch her breath, and just at that moment along the hall came Annie, dust-pan and brush in hand.

'Dear me,' said Annie, spying the Little Rag Doll, 'where will that child Harriet Ann leave this poor doll next?'

Annie stooped and lifted the Little Rag Doll. She set her on the newel post with a friendly thump.

'I'll leave you here till I finish sweeping the porch,' said she, 'and then I'll carry you back upstairs where you belong.'

The Little Rag Doll tried to look pleasant as Annie clattered out on the porch.

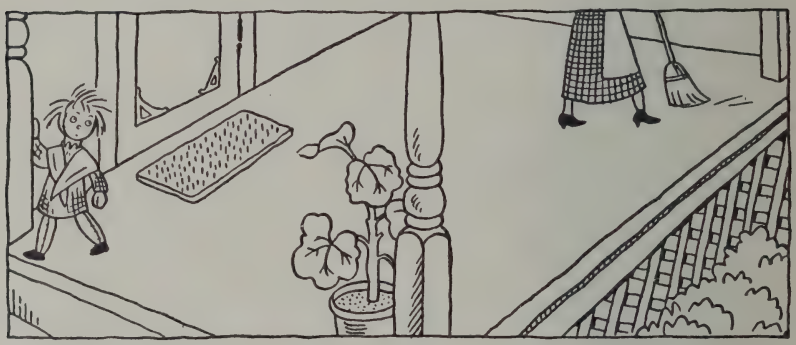
'She means well,' said the Little Rag Doll patiently, 'but oh! what a fall I'm going to have to get back to where I was before. "Let well enough alone." I have heard Harriet Ann's father say that to Harriet Ann a dozen times, and I believe it is a good rule.'

The top of the newel post seemed very far from the ground. But the Little Rag Doll shut her eyes, gathered herself together, and made a spring.

'There now!' said she from the floor a second later.

'That didn't hurt. Now I mustn't waste a moment, for Annie will be coming back.'

The screen door was ajar. Kind Annie had left it so. The Little Rag Doll, her hand pressed to her



heart, her hair standing out straight with excitement, peeped round the doorway. Annie, her back turned, was at the other end of the porch. She was sweeping vigorously and singing as she worked.

'Now is my chance,' thought the Little Rag Doll. 'Now or never.'

She slipped out of the doorway, pattered across the porch, and flung herself sideways off the steps to land headfirst in a great soft bed of ivy that clambered up the wall.

'Good!' said the Little Rag Doll to herself, sitting up straight among the ivy leaves and carefully smoothing her new pink shawl. 'This running away isn't so bad. Not half so hard as living with Harriet Ann. Now where do I want to go next? Away from the brook, that I know.'

Down the side path tripped the Little Rag Doll. She felt quite grown-up and elegant to be out walking by herself.

'How much pleasanter than to be dragged by one arm,' thought she. 'I only wish I had a red umbrella and a feather fan.'

You can see for yourself, from this, that the Little Rag Doll was fond of dress. She had always admired the red umbrella carried by Harriet Ann's mother. It cast such a soft, rosy glow upon one's face. It

was Harriet Ann's mother, too, who owned a beautiful scarlet feather fan that was only taken out of its box for dinner parties and the like. Once the Little Rag Doll had touched the feather fan as they lay side by side on the bed. It was a very shy and timid touch, but the Little Rag Doll had never forgotten how soft the feathers felt nor how gently they had curled about her careful hand. Yes, certainly the Little Rag Doll was fond of pretty clothes, though up to that moment, barring her new pink shawl, she had had very little chance to try her taste.

But now she gave herself a little shake.

'If I don't hurry along,' said she in a sensible way, 'some one will catch me, as sure as can be. I had better squeeze under the grape-vine and go straight up the hill to the huckleberry patch. That is just the other way from the brook. Then I can sit down under a huckleberry bush and think.'

Under the grape-vine and through the garden fence crept the Little Rag Doll. She found herself at the foot of a hill covered over with huckleberries.

There were so many of the low green bushes, laden just now with glossy purple fruit, that the hill was known far and wide as Huckleberry Hill.

There was a faint path up the hillside and, nothing daunted, along the way started the Little Rag Doll.

'The farther away from the house I go the safer I shall feel,' thought she. 'I think I could be comfortable here, living under a bush. It would be sheltered and dry and there are plenty of berries to eat. I don't believe Harriet Ann often comes up this way. If she should there are places to hide.'

The Little Rag Doll shut her lips and toiled up the sunny path in silence for a while. The hill grew steep toward the top and the Little Rag Doll was growing short of breath.

'Here is the top,' she panted at last. 'Now I can sit down under a bush and rest.'

Down on the ground sat the Little Rag Doll. She smoothed out her pink shawl and folded over her checked gingham skirt so that the worst dirt marks wouldn't show. Then she began to think.

'The first thing to do,' said she, staring straight

ahead and talking aloud because she felt so earnest about it all, 'is to give myself a name. It isn't right for a person not to have a name. I can take any name that I wish, and I think I know the name that I shall choose.'

A pleasant smile appeared on the Little Rag Doll's face. She was thinking of something or of some one whom she liked.

But a moment later the pleasant smile faded quite out of sight. The Little Rag Doll's eyes grew large with fright. Her untidy hair stood out straighter than before all round her head. For between the leaves of a near-by huckleberry bush there peered a face, a little, saucy, mischievous, laughing face.

For one dreadful instant the Little Rag Doll thought it was Harriet Ann. That was what frightened her so, you see. She could feel herself being dragged down Huckleberry Hill by one arm, thumping and bumping over the bushes and stones.

But presently the gay little face opened its mouth and spoke, and then the Little Rag Doll knew of course it was not Harriet Ann.

'Good afternoon,' said the face politely. 'Won't you tell me your name?'

The Little Rag Doll wanted dreadfully to stand up and make a curtsey. She knew how to do it perfectly well.

But at this moment her legs felt strange and weak, as if they had lost their cotton. So all the Little Rag Doll could do was to sit quite still and smile. Now the face spoke again, and though it was still laughing and gay, the voice sounded a trifle impatient, not to say tart.

'Can't you speak?' said the face. 'Won't you tell me your name?'

At this the Little Rag Doll spoke out bravely.

'Yes, I can talk,' said she with her sweetest smile. 'And I will tell you my name. It is Dilly. That is my very own name. Dilly!'

## CHAPTER II

### MRS. THIMBLETOP

'DILLY is your name, is it?' said the laughing face. 'Well, Dilly, here I come.'

The huckleberry leaves were pushed aside and there stepped out of the bush a little lady, no higher than your hand, one of the prettiest little ladies that Rag Doll Dilly had ever seen.

Dilly stared. She didn't know what to make of the little lady. She was not a child, she was not a doll, and yet she didn't look at all like Harriet Ann's mother nor any of her friends.

It really seemed as if the little lady knew what was passing through Dilly's mind. She gazed at Dilly with her head on one side and her eyes half closed and laughed a somewhat saucy laugh.

'Yes,' said the little lady, 'it is all quite true. I am not a little girl and I am not a doll baby. That you can see for yourself. Then what am I? Well, I will tell you. I am a Fairy. I really am. And if any one ever tries to tell you that there aren't any fairies — and people are always saying that — you tell them that you have seen one, that you know her, and that she is just as much alive as you are yourself!'

The Fairy gave such a sharp nod when she finished her speech that Dilly couldn't help staring at the hat she wore on her head. It was a hat, wasn't it? It fitted her perfectly, and yet Dilly knew she had seen something like it *not* used as a hat. But where she had seen it she couldn't think.

The Fairy caught Dilly looking at her hat and laughed good-naturedly. When she laughed her eyes crinkled up at the corners and her cheeks grew very pink. Her eyes were brown. They looked like

black-eyed Susans, Dilly thought. Her hair was brown too, hazel-nut brown and curly, and it floated out behind her like a soft little cloud. Her nose was tilted and pert. Indeed her whole face had a saucy look. Her dress was a lovely pink, a pale violet-pink, and Dilly knew if she touched it the dress would feel as soft as a flower.

But Dilly couldn't take her eyes off the little lady's hat. Where had she seen a shining little cap like that before?

'Think again, Dilly,' said the Fairy with a teasing laugh. 'Watch me! See what I am going to do!'

The Fairy caught up Dilly's skirt, and as if she had a needle and thread took a few stitches in the hem.

'I know, of course,' cried Dilly with an excited little laugh. 'A thimble! That is what it is. A silver thimble! But why do you wear it for a hat?'

'Why not?' asked the Fairy in return. 'It looks well, doesn't it? Come sit down under this bush with me and I will tell you all about it.

'To begin with,' said the Fairy, when they were

comfortably settled in a cool and shady spot, 'I must tell you my name. I named myself and I took the name from my hat. My name is Mrs. Thimbletop.'

'So did I,' interrupted Dilly, leaning forward in her surprise. 'I named myself too, I mean. Isn't that strange?'

'You did?' answered Mrs. Thimbletop, looking hard at Dilly as she spoke. 'You must tell me all about it afterward when I have finished my story of how I came by this hat.'

'Yes,' murmured gentle Dilly, sinking back and feeling that perhaps she had been rude. 'Yes, do tell me, please.'

'In the first place,' began Mrs. Thimbletop, speaking in a brisk little voice and with many a nod of her thimble-hatted head, 'I haven't lived very long in this huckleberry pasture. I used to live in a flower garden. Oh, 'way down there on the road.'

Here Mrs. Thimbletop waved an airy hand and Dilly nodded politely in reply, though she hadn't an idea where Mrs. Thimbletop meant.

'I grew dreadfully tired of that garden,' went on

Mrs. Thimbletop, her gay little face turning sober for a moment or two. 'It rained and it rained and it rained. The fairies in the garden did nothing but grumble and scold about the wet. "The children can't go out to play," they said. "Our clothes won't dry. We can't go out and dance in the grass." So one morning I slipped away from the garden. I didn't say a word to a soul. I came up here to stay for a while for I wanted a rest from so much talk. You can't stop the rain by grumbling. You know that. Just be patient and wait a bit and soon the sun will shine again. Well, I liked it up here. It was so quiet and peaceful with nobody to scold about the rain.'

Dilly opened her lips to say something and then thought better of it and closed them again. Mrs. Thimbletop didn't seem to notice, but went straight on with her tale.

'It was the afternoon of the very day I came,' said she. 'It was raining still and there wasn't a soul about. The leaves and the grass were simply soaking wet. The berries glistened in the rain. The field mice and the bugs were safe at home. The birds were snug

and dry in their nests. And I — heard — some one — coming, running hard!'

Mrs. Thimbletop's voice dropped low and her eyes were shining bright.

'Who was it?' asked Dilly, almost breathless with excitement, her honest blue eyes fixed on Mrs. Thimbletop's laughing face. 'Who was it coming in the rain?'

'A little girl,' answered Mrs. Thimbletop, waving a tiny forefinger under Dilly's nose, 'a little girl running as fast as she could pelt. She came scuffling and jumping through the clover field the other side of that fence and the first thing I knew she had climbed up on the bars and was looking right over here toward my bush.

'Her face was red and she seemed dreadfully upset about something. She held the thimble tight in her hand, though of course at the time I didn't know what it was, and she began to wave her arm about and to shout. She called out, "She wants me to sit still and sew! I hate to sew! I won't! I just won't!" I heard what she said as plainly as could be. Then she opened her hand and flung the thimble straight into the huckleberry bush where I was hiding! It gave me a start, I can tell you, but I didn't stir. There lay the thimble under the huckleberry bush, quite out of sight.

'Then the little girl climbed down from the bars and ran off. It was pouring rain and she had no hat and the grass in the clover field is so high that her socks must have been drenched. I have never seen her since. I have no idea who she was. But I picked up the thimble and put it on for a hat. I thought I might as well. It fits me and I like it. Don't you? But what's the matter? You look as if your eyes were going to pop out of your head.'

'Oh, I hope not,' said Dilly, taken aback. 'That

wouldn't be pleasant at all. But do tell me this. Did the little girl have yellow hair all flying round? And a blue dress with white spots? And had she lost a tooth right straight in front?'

'Yes,' replied Mrs. Thimbletop, looking startled, 'yes, three times. But how did you know? Were you here? Do you know the little girl?'

'No, I wasn't here,' said Dilly in a faint voice, leaning back among the leaves. 'But I know the little girl. It was Harriet Ann.'

'And who is Harriet Ann, pray tell?' demanded Mrs. Thimbletop, sitting up very straight and tossing her head. 'You look quite pale and faint at the very mention of her name.'

Dilly nodded. Yes, that was the way she felt, pale and faint.

'She is the little girl I lived with,' she murmured,

'until this afternoon. I've run away, you know, and I don't want to go back. It frightens me to think that she was up here. She may come again, right soon.'

Merry Mrs. Thimbletop, gay as she was, looked a trifle worried. This was because she had a kind heart and felt sorry for poor little Dilly in her distress. She put one arm firmly round Dilly's shoulders and with the other hand deftly picked a plump huckleberry or two.

'Now eat these few berries,' said she in a soothing voice, pressing them to Dilly's trembling lips. 'Keep as calm as you can, and when you feel like it tell me about Harriet Ann.'

Dilly, refreshed by several sips of huckleberry juice, was soon able to speak, and presently found herself telling Mrs. Thimbletop all she knew about Harriet Ann.

Dilly was fair and honest in what she said. She told only the truth. But when she finished, in her gentle heart she was afraid she had been unkind. She laid her hand on Mrs. Thimbletop's knee and spoke in an earnest voice.

'You know Harriet Ann is really a good little girl,' said Dilly. 'It is only that I don't think she is fitted to have a doll. A doll wants to be loved and cared for. At least I do, and that is something she doesn't know about yet. Now are you sure that I have made you understand just what kind of a little girl Harriet Ann really is?'

'Yes, Dilly,' answered Mrs. Thimbletop, with a funny little smile, 'I think I understand just what kind of a little girl Harriet Ann really is. But, Dilly, tell me this. Why did Harriet Ann throw her thimble into the huckleberry patch?'

'Oh, yes,' said Dilly with a nod, 'I know all about that. It was her Cousin Drucilla who made her throw her thimble away.'

'How?' demanded Mrs. Thimbletop sharply, 'How?'

She didn't look worried now in the least, did Mrs. Thimbletop. Her mouth took on a saucy curve and her eyes held a twinkle as if she might be going to laugh any minute.

'I'll tell you,' began Dilly.

But before she got any further both she and Mrs. Thimbletop were startled by a loud cry that sounded close to their ears. Indeed, Dilly was so frightened that she tumbled right out of the bush on to the ground.

'Moo! Moo!' came the cry again.

Dilly looked up to see a great white cow close by, staring at them from the clover field over the pasture bars.

Mrs. Thimbletop hastened to help Dilly to her feet. Then she turned impatiently upon the cow.

'Shoo! Go away!' she cried, her tiny face scowled into a frown. 'Go away, Daisy, do! Can't you see I have company? Be polite now and go away.'

The cow stared for a moment more with sad brown eyes at Dilly and Mrs. Thimbletop. Then, with a mournful 'Moo!' she turned and ambled slowly off.

'Poor thing!' said gentle Dilly, feeling they had been rude and trying to think of something pleasant to say about the cow. 'She looks as if she were so good.'

'Good! Good!' Mrs. Thimbletop turned on Dilly

in a funny little fury of rage. 'That is just the trouble with Daisy. She is too good. She does nothing but stare at me over the fence and moo until I could scream. She never has a word to say. She never has a bit of news. For my part I like the news,' said Mrs. Thimbletop with recovered good-temper. 'Go right on now and tell me about Cousin Drucilla and Harriet Ann.'

'Cousin Drucilla came visiting,' began Dilly promptly, 'and she is visiting at our house yet. She is a Missionary to the Blacks, whatever they may be, and she teaches them how to sew. She thought if she could teach the Blacks in Africa how to sew she could teach Harriet Ann. But she couldn't. Harriet Ann wouldn't learn.'

'I can see that she didn't,' said Mrs. Thimbletop, eyeing Dilly's shabby dress. 'It would have been better for you if she had. So she threw away her thimble, eh? And broke her needle and tangled her thread next, I suppose?'

'Yes, she did,' answered Dilly in surprise. 'How did you know that?'

'I guessed it,' said Mrs. Thimbletop with a gay laugh. 'Now, Dilly, I've been thinking. You mustn't stay here in this huckleberry pasture. The berries are ripe now. Soon this whole hill will be filled with people carrying pails and picking berries as fast as ever they can. I wouldn't be surprised to see Harriet Ann up here with her pail any minute now.'

Dilly started to her feet, but Mrs. Thimbletop waved her back.

'Just a minute, just a minute,' said she. 'Let me finish what I have to say. Now, to be truthful, I am tired of it here in this berry patch. I seem to grow tired of it wherever I am, don't I? But there is no harm in that. I can always move on. At any rate I am tired of it here. I am dreadfully tired of Daisy the cow. So I say — let's run away together, just you and I. Don't you think we could have a good time?'

Gentle little Dilly clasped her hands in joy. This seemed too good to be true. She had taken a fancy to Mrs. Thimbletop at first sight. And no wonder,

Mrs. Thimbletop was so pleasant and lively and gay. And kind too. See how she had put an arm about Dilly and given her huckleberry juice to drink. No one except the real little girl Dilly had ever been so kind to her before. Dilly felt overcome with happiness at the thought of running away with Mrs. Thimbletop. She simply couldn't speak.

But wise, understanding Mrs. Thimbletop saw just how it was.

'You want to come with me, Dilly, don't you?' said she. 'You need some one to take care of you, that is plain. But I have one favor to ask of you before we start.'

Dilly nodded. She was ready to promise Mrs. Thimbletop anything that she might ask.

'Forget that I am a Fairy,' said Mrs. Thimbletop, taking both of Dilly's hands in hers and looking straight into her eyes. 'Do you think you can do that?'

'Yes,' answered Dilly, finding her voice.

That, she thought, would be easy to do, because she hadn't begun yet to think of Mrs. Thimbletop as

a Fairy at all. She thought of her only as a kind and merry and helpful friend.

'Good, then,' said Mrs. Thimbletop briskly, giving Dilly's hand a gentle squeeze. 'Now this is my idea. This is what I want to do. All my life I have wanted to keep house for some one. Not fairy housekeeping, but real housekeeping, I mean. I want to really cook and scrub and sew. Now you need somebody to take good care of you for a while. You need to be petted and to rest and to have good food. I could do a little sewing for you, too, I think,' added Mrs. Thimbletop delicately. She was too polite to say that Dilly sadly needed a new, clean dress.

Dilly's face grew bright as she listened to these pleasant plans. She wanted to start at once. Indeed she took one or two little steps, but Mrs. Thimbletop held her fast.

'You see, Dilly,' said Mrs. Thimbletop thoughtfully, 'we must find a place to live in. Most people stay in their houses here in the country in the summertime. But we may find an empty corner in an attic or even a barn where we can keep house.'

At these magic words 'keep house' Mrs. Thimbletop seemed to fall into a dream.

'I mean to make myself an apron, first thing,' she murmured, 'an apron that will cover me from head to foot. And then I shall cook. Oh, how I shall cook!'

Mrs. Thimbletop came to herself with a start.

'I know how to cook,' said she, tossing her thimble-crowned head. 'When I lived in the flower garden I used to spend most of my time on the kitchen window-sill watching the cook. Come on, Dilly. Let's start.'

Dilly was quite ready, and hand in hand she and Mrs. Thimbletop made their way through the berry bushes and under the fence into the clover field.

'We will go this way,' explained Mrs. Thimbletop, 'because we don't want to walk through Harriet Ann's garden. Oh, there is Daisy! Good-bye, Daisy,' she called, making a saucy little nose at the cow who stood thoughtfully chewing her cud. 'Don't get into mischief while I'm gone. I'll be back to see you some day soon.'

'Good-bye, Daisy,' called kind little Dilly, who felt sorry for the lonely bossy. 'Good-bye.'

'Moo! Moo!' was Daisy's answer, as she slowly turned her big brown eyes upon them.

But as Mrs. Thimbletop remarked, 'It is all she ever does say.—"Moo! Moo!"' mocked pert Mrs. Thimbletop. 'Come on, Dilly. Let's hurry. Here's the road.'

## CHAPTER III

### THE PLAYHOUSE

DOWN the road started Mrs. Thimbletop and Dilly hand in hand. A droll little pair they were, to be sure, but very well pleased with the errand that took them out on the great highway.

It is true that Dilly felt a trifle timid. It was the first time she had been so far from home. In fact it was the first time she had stepped forth into the big world, and it is no wonder that she was a little frightened to find herself there. A barking dog made her tremble and hide behind a milkweed plant. The

swoop and rush of a passing automobile sent her off the road and up the side of the bank, and she couldn't have trembled and gasped in greater terror if a lion or a tiger had caught her in his jaws.

'Now, see here, Dilly,' said Mrs. Thimbletop a trifle impatiently, as she pulled her friend down from the leafy bank, 'you must be more calm and peaceful or we shall both be worn out before we find our house. Nothing is going to harm you. I will see to that. We must expect adventures. All travelers do. Come now! Walk here at the side of the road in the grass, and I will hold fast to your hand.'

'I am sorry to make so much trouble,' said Dilly humbly, in her gentle little voice.

But lively Mrs. Thimbletop would have none of that.

'Nonsense,' said she briskly, giving Dilly's hand

a squeeze. 'I know just how you feel. Now let us both think of something pleasant, and when we reach that turn in the road just ahead we will each tell the other what it was about.'

Deep in thought of something pleasant, Dilly's face soon grew bright again, which was what Mrs. Thimbletop wanted, and at the turn in the road they sat down on a large flat stone to rest and talk.

'You tell first,' said Mrs. Thimbletop, with an air of command, 'and mind you tell all you thought.'

'I will,' answered Dilly happily. 'I am glad to tell. I was thinking about our home, what a good time we are going to have. And how pleasant it is to be walking along the road with you instead of being tied by one foot to the bedpost or dragged about by one arm. Not but that Harriet Ann didn't know any better. It really wasn't her fault.'

'Hum!' said Mrs. Thimbletop, with a kindly look at little Dilly's shining face. 'Well, anyway, I was thinking just about the same thing. Only I was thinking more about my apron. Oh, Dilly, I do want a big apron that will cover me from head to foot.

I want to do up my hair in a tight little knub at the back of my head, and roll up my sleeves, and go to work. It is very tiresome to do nothing but be a Fairy all day long.'

'Is it?' said Dilly. 'I should think it would be sweet.'

'Sometimes it is,' was Mrs. Thimbletop's reply. 'I do have fun. And I love to play tricks. But I am restless and impatient, Dilly. I am not good like you. You should have the best of everything, and I mean to make you the prettiest dress in the world if I have any chance to sew.'

'Oh, thank you,' said Dilly gratefully, her face one bright smile. 'But I shall like it better if you make your apron first. I really shall.'

'We won't argue about that,' was Mrs. Thimbletop's sensible reply. 'We will find a place to live in first. Now look at this house here next to the church. You might think it would suit us nicely, but it won't. It belongs to the new minister and I hear he has six big boys. There would be no peace here for you and me, that I know.'

They pressed on down the road and presently came to several houses clustered about a store. But before each one Mrs. Thimbletop shook her head.

'They are filled with people,' said she, walking briskly by. 'Mothers and fathers and children and cousins and aunts. We should have no time to live, we should be so busy hiding away from them all. Now this big white house, standing all by itself, looks empty, Dilly. Let's go round to the back door and see.'

Both back and front the house seemed empty. The shutters were closed fast, the doors locked tight. To be sure the grass was nicely cut and the hedge was trimmed. But the garden behind the house was a mass of blooms. It looked as if no one had gathered flowers there for weeks and weeks.

As Mrs. Thimbletop and Dilly stood at the back of the house looking out over the garden, Dilly gave a little cry.

'Look!' called Dilly. 'Look!'

A path led from the back porch of the house down between the flower-beds to the orchard at the foot

of the garden. And there at the end of the path, snuggled under a pear tree that threw soft shadows on the roof, stood a little house, the prettiest little house that Dilly and Mrs. Thimbletop had ever seen.

It was a small white house, one story high, with a sloping roof painted a rich green, and from the roof there rose a bright red chimney that made the whole house look as if it had come straight from the pages of a picture book. The little front door was painted a rich green too, and the window on either side of the door was nicely shuttered, though unlike the big house these shutters were not closed.

'We could peep in if it weren't for the curtains,' murmured Dilly, admiring the gay posies of pink and blue that she could see plainly through the glass.

But Mrs. Thimbletop was too deep in thought to answer. She was gazing at the green front door.

'I am wondering how to get in,' said she.

The next moment she had sprung up on the window-sill. Leaning over as far as she could, she grasped the door-knob and gave it a shake.

It was a small white house, one story
high, with a sloping roof painted green

'Locked,' said she. 'I knew it. Now where in the world do you suppose they have hidden the key?'

Dilly had a bright thought.

'I know where Harriet Ann's mother used to hide the key when Annie was out,' said she. 'Under the door mat. Shall I look?'

Mrs. Thimbletop nodded. So Dilly pulled up the little door mat at each corner in turn, peeked here and there with great earnestness, and presently gave a little pounce and a cry.

'Here it is, Mrs. Thimbletop,' she called. 'I have found it. Here it is.'

'Wait until I climb onto the door-knob,' directed Mrs. Thimbletop, trying not to show how excited she felt, 'and then see if you can hand it up to me.'

Dilly, holding the key at arm's length, stood on tiptoe and reached as high as she could. Mrs. Thimbletop leaned from the door-knob. She stretched down and down until it seemed as if she must fall. But no! She grasped the key. She fitted it into the keyhole. One swift turn and a push and the little green door swung open before their eyes.

Down on the door-step Mrs. Thimbletop and Dilly stood side by side.

'Doesn't it look sweet?' said Dilly, gazing into the little room beyond. 'Doesn't it all seem too good to be true?'

'Yes, it does,' said Mrs. Thimbletop solemnly, though her eyes danced with mischief and fun. 'But I want to make sure there is nobody here. What was that? Did somebody move?'

'I didn't see any one,' answered Dilly, leaning forward and peering as hard as she could. 'Did you?'

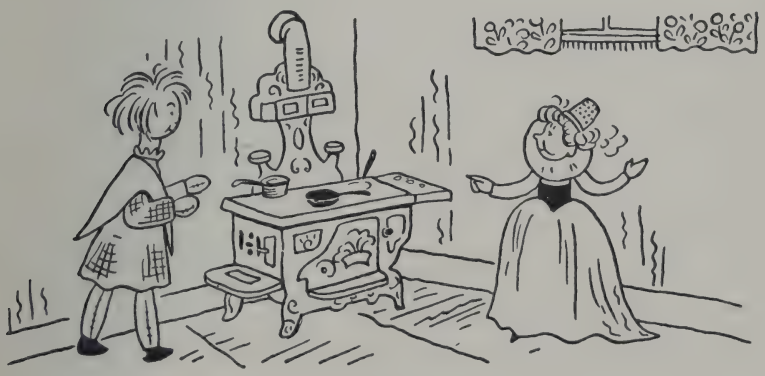
'I thought I saw something whisk past,' said Mrs. Thimbletop. 'But perhaps not. Let us go in anyway and see.'

Once inside the little house Dilly and Mrs. Thimbletop looked carefully about. They saw no one. So they boldly walked around the room, looking here, there, and everywhere, and almost too delighted at what they saw to speak.

For the little house was completely furnished with everything that they might wish to use.

There was a little cook-stove, standing in one corner back against the wall.

'Just exactly what I want to cook on,' murmured Mrs. Thimbletop, clasping her hands. 'Oh, Dilly, what good things I shall make for you to eat. And see the cupboard full of dishes, and all the shiny little pots and pans.'



'There is the bed,' said Dilly, pointing to a neat white-painted bed covered with a pretty pink-and-white spread. 'Doesn't it look comfortable?'

And the longing look that Dilly cast upon the little bed ought to have told Mrs. Thimbletop that there was nothing in the world Dilly would like so well as to creep under the pretty pink spread for a good long rest.

'There is a table, cover and all, where we can eat our meals,' said Mrs. Thimbletop, gazing about with a housekeepery eye. 'A bureau and mirror, and plenty of chairs, and a rocking-chair with cushions too. I do wonder who lives in this house, Dilly. Do you see that all the furniture is just our size? It seems very queer to me. There is really everything you could wish right here in this room. What a pretty green-and-white rug they have on the floor!'

'And the curtains,' said Dilly faintly, leaning against the wall. All of a sudden she felt so tired she could scarcely stand. 'I think they are the prettiest curtains I have ever seen.'

'Yes, little pink and blue flowers. I like them

too,' said Mrs. Thimbletop in an absent voice. She was poking delicately in one of the bureau drawers.

Suddenly she gave a little shriek.

'Dilly!' exclaimed Mrs. Thimbletop. 'I have found a work-basket and a bundle of pieces! Every color, dotted and striped and flowered too. Oh, what pretty things I shall make for both of us. I shall sew and sew and sew.'

She turned as she spoke and caught sight of poor Dilly leaning against the wall.

'My dear!' cried Mrs. Thimbletop, shutting the bureau drawer with a snap. 'You are tired out. You must go straight to bed. Let me help you take off your dress and your shoes, and then you creep right in. Sit down here by the bed. Don't stand another minute.'

Dilly thankfully sank into the chair that Mrs. Thimbletop pushed forward, but as she did so she caught sight of something sticking out from under the bed. It was white and furry and it looked to Dilly uncommonly like somebody's paw.

'Oh, look!' said Dilly in a frightened voice, pointing with a little hand that shook. 'Oh, look!'

And then, because Dilly was so tired, and not because she was not brave, she cowered down behind Mrs. Thimbletop and screwed her eyes shut as tightly as ever she could. She would have put her fingers in her ears too, only she wanted to hear what was going on.

If Mrs. Thimbletop was frightened, she didn't show it at all. She stamped her tiny foot and called in a commanding voice: 'Come out! Come out, whoever you are!'

Out from under the bed crept a cat, a large, comfortable, motherly cat. Her fur was reddish-yellow or orange-red, whichever you like, and she had pretty white markings that gave her a neat collar and apron and four pretty white shoes. Her eyes were yellow, amber-yellow, her nose was pink, and her fine whiskers stood out stiff and straight with excitement and perhaps a bit of fright.

'A cat!' exclaimed Mrs. Thimbletop. 'A cat, I declare! Well, at least it is not a cow. I

simply couldn't bear it if it were another staring cow.'

At the word 'cat' Dilly opened her eyes. She was not afraid of cats. She had grown to know cats quite well during the nights that Harriet Ann had left her out on the porch, and she had always found them both agreeable and friendly to her.

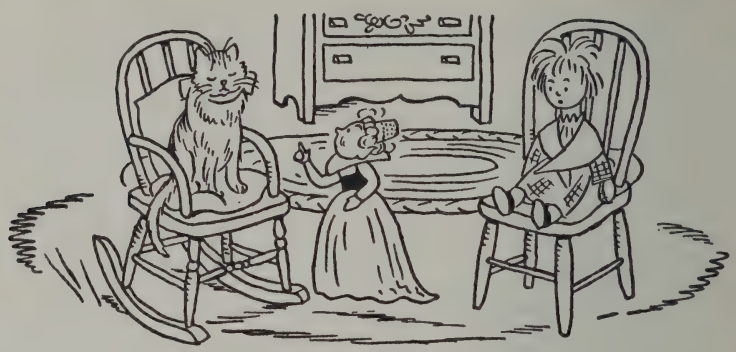
She was about to say something kind and pleasant about cats when Mrs. Thimbletop spoke again.

'What is your name?' demanded Mrs. Thimbletop. 'And what are you doing here?'

'My name?' answered the cat faintly. 'It is Reddy, on account of my fur.'

Without another word the cat crawled over to the rocking-chair and seated herself in it. She put her head back against the cushions and closed her eyes. Then she rocked herself gently to and fro while Dilly and Mrs. Thimbletop looked on.

'Dear me,' said Reddy in a low voice, after what seemed a long, long time, 'dear me, I'm all of a twitter. Your key in the door startled me so. I was having a little cat-nap, you know, and the noise



frightened me almost out of my wits. Just wait until my nerves quiet down, and I will tell you all about myself and everything else you want to know.'

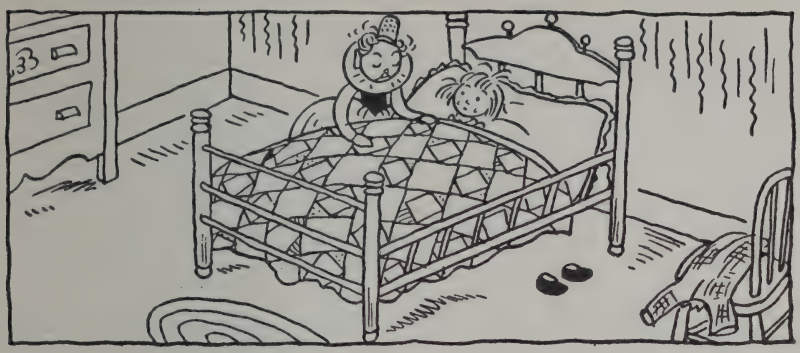
But Mrs. Thimbletop couldn't wait.

'Whose house is this?' she asked. 'Can we stay here, do you think?'

Reddy opened one eye just a crack and slowly nodded her head.

'Yes, you can stay,' she whispered. 'This house belongs to a little girl named Debby, and she is away. This is Debby's playhouse,' said Reddy.

Then she closed her eye again and once more began rocking slowly to and fro.



## CHAPTER IV

### GRANDMA REDDY

THE plump pussy cat, with eyes shut fast, rocked herself to and fro, to and fro, without another word. It seemed as if she never meant to open her eyes and speak, and Dilly and Mrs. Thimbletop grew very tired of waiting and being so still. There were a dozen questions they wanted to ask, and Dilly couldn't help stealing glances every now and then at that comfortable little bed.

Suddenly Mrs. Thimbletop whirled round on her heel.

'Come, Dilly,' said she. 'You get into bed. You

are tired out, and you can hear what Reddy has to say just as well if you are resting as you can leaning against that chair.'

Gently Mrs. Thimbletop helped Dilly take off her shabby little dress. Then she bent down and pulled off Dilly's shoes.

'Put on the pink shawl for a night-gown,' she whispered. 'I will make you a night-gown as soon as I have time.'

She and Dilly exchanged a little smile when their backs were turned to Reddy's chair. They both saw that the puss had opened one eye and was closely watching all that they did.

Mrs. Thimbletop turned back the pretty pink-and-white spread and gave the soft pillows a pat and a plump. Then, oh! how thankfully weary Dilly crept in between the snowy sheets and cozily snuggled down as Mrs. Thimbletop tucked the blanket round her shoulders and back.

At that moment little Dilly felt that her cup of joy was full. But she must make sure that Mrs. Thimbletop had a comfortable bed as well.

'Will you sleep in here with me to-night, Mrs. Thimbletop?' said she. 'There is plenty of room for us both in this wide bed.'

'Who? Me? Sleep in a bed?' answered Mrs. Thimbletop, with a laugh and a pat for Dilly's head. 'I couldn't sleep in a bed, child. I will curl up in the rose-bush outside the door. Roses make the best beds, I think. You must try it some night, my dear, and see.'

By this time Reddy had opened both eyes wide. She sat up straight in her chair and her rocking took on a brisk swing. It was plain she was ready to speak, and Mrs. Thimbletop drew up a chair to the side of Dilly's bed and settled down to listen.

'Begin with Debby,' said Mrs. Thimbletop.

So Reddy began.

'As I have already told you, Debby is a little girl,' was Reddy's opening remark, 'and a pleasanter little girl you would go far to find. She lives up in the big white house with her mother and her Great-Aunt Deborah. They are all away just now, as you can see for yourself, and the house is closed. When they

are home there is a cook named Pink in the kitchen and a man named Ashton who drives the car and

weeds the garden and cuts the grass. But they are away now too.'

Mrs. Thimbletop nodded and gave Dilly's foot a little pat, but she didn't speak.

'Now I will tell you about this house,' said Reddy. 'It used to be a woodshed, a long time ago. Many a mouse have I caught in here in the days when I was young and spry. Next it was sort of a store-room and a place to keep tools and odds and ends. But one day early this spring, when Aunt Deborah was out here in the garden talking to Ashton about planting seeds and the like, she looked over at this little house and she said out loud, for I was sitting in the sun and I heard her, "Why wouldn't that make a playhouse for Debby, I should like to know?"

'Well, the very next day they began to turn this into a playhouse. I came down every day to watch them at work. First they cleared out all the rubbish and they had a fine bonfire, I can tell you. It warmed me through and through that chilly spring weather.'

Here Reddy stretched herself out in her rocking-chair and opened and shut her paws as if she felt the comfort of the bonfire all over again.

'The next thing they did was to have the house painted inside and out. Oh! how the paint did smell. I didn't care for that part of the work at all. I never dared lie down for fear of getting in wet paint, and Debby did step straight into a pail of it. Green it was, and for a week or more there were smudges and streaks of green all over her leg and knee. That was an exciting morning when she stepped into the paint. Debby screamed and the painter laughed and I hid. Pink and Ashton came running, only Pink is too fat to run. And Aunt Deborah and Debby's mother came with rags and a big bottle of something, and they pulled off Debby's shoe and stocking and threw them away. Then they rubbed and scrubbed Debby's

leg — they all took turns — until she was clean again, quite clean, that is.'

Reddy paused here to rub her nose thoughtfully, but Mrs. Thimbletop was soon urging her on.

'What next?' said Mrs. Thimbletop. 'Go on, do.'

'Well, next came the carpenter, and he and Ashton made the chimney and fastened it on. It is just make-believe. There isn't any fireplace, you know. Ashton painted it.'

'It is a pretty color,' said Dilly.

But Reddy didn't even nod. She went straight on.

'They fixed the windows and the shutters and a loose board or two. They stopped up a couple of my

old mouse-holes. But I don't hold any grudge against them for that. They didn't know they were mine. They didn't touch the place where I go in and out, so I have no fault to find.'

Reddy gave a wide cat smile and began to purr. She seemed pleased with these newcomers. No doubt she liked to have some one listen to her talk.

'When the house was ready everybody began to bring things in. Pink washed and put down the rug on the floor, and Debby's mother made the curtains for the windows and hung them up. Ashton and Debby carried out the toys, and Ashton gave the furniture a fresh coat of paint. It was Aunt Deborah who fixed over the bed. Is it comfortable?'

And Reddy turned a friendly look upon Dilly in her soft white nest.

'Very comfortable,' answered Dilly with her gentle smile. 'But isn't it where you sleep? I don't want to take your place, you know.'

'Oh, no, no,' said Reddy, twitching her ears back and forth, 'I don't sleep there. I usually curl up

on the cushions in this rocking-chair. But I don't live here, you know. I'm visiting. I've run away from home.'

'You have run away from home?' Dilly and Mrs. Thimbletop said it in one breath. They stared at Reddy, they stared at one another, and then they began to laugh.

Dilly laughed until she fell back among her pillows. She lay there watching Mrs. Thimbletop's brown eyes crinkle up and her cheeks grow pink.

'That is the way she looked,' thought Dilly, 'when she stepped out of the huckleberry bush.'

'You must excuse our laughing,' said Mrs. Thimbletop politely, when at last she sobered down, 'but you see, we have run away too. So we all three have run away from home.'

'You don't mean it,' said Reddy with a grin. 'Isn't that strange? Tell me about it, do.'

'Not now,' replied Mrs. Thimbletop, shaking her head. 'It is growing late and I want Dilly to go to sleep. We will tell you everything to-morrow, about my hat, and Harriet Ann, and what happened

to Dilly, and all. You finish your story now and then we will go to bed. Tell us how you came to run away and what you are doing in this house.'

'I am making a long visit here,' answered Reddy. 'Just how long I don't know, for I never mean to go back home again. This is what happened to me. I have lived all my life with our old minister's wife in that house next the church down the road. Perhaps you have seen it. It is a white church and the house I mean is painted gray.'

Mrs. Thimbletop and Dilly nodded. They remembered the church and the house well.

'I went there a kitten,' continued the cat thoughtfully, 'and now I am a grandmother. My children

and grandchildren are living all over this village and some have gone to the city too. We are considered a handsome family, if I may say so myself!'

Here Reddy smiled, with the tip of a pink tongue showing, but soon went on with her tale.

'I couldn't have had a better home than with that minister's wife. She liked me, and she petted me, and as for milk — there was always a saucerful standing right there on the hearth for me. I thought I would live and die with that minister's wife. But they moved away, far away to town, and a new minister came.'

Reddy stopped to shake her head and to cough politely behind her paw.

'This new minister,' continued Reddy, 'had a wife too — she meant well — and six boys. Can you believe it? Six minister's boys. And they didn't mean well at all. At least not by me. They didn't treat me with any respect. And me a grandmother too.'

Reddy paused and looked so reproachfully at Dilly that Dilly felt she was expected to speak.

'Dear me!' said Dilly, for that was all she could think to say. 'Dear me!'

'Wasn't that dreadful?' went on Reddy. 'What do you think they called me? Tom! And me a grandmother! Would you ever think of calling a grandmother Tom?'

'Never!' answered Mrs. Thimbletop. Dilly could see by her mouth that she was trying not to laugh. 'I wouldn't dream of calling anybody's grandmother Tom.'

'Of course not,' answered Reddy, indignantly waving her tail. 'Why, all my grandchildren, and children too, call me Grandma Reddy. They treat

me with the greatest respect. And sometimes my own minister's wife called me that. "Here comes little Grandma Reddy," she would say.'

Reddy really looked as if she might be going to cry. Her pink nose was twitching and her whiskers quivered in a pitiful sort of way.

Mrs. Thimbletop sprang to her feet and put both arms about the cat's plump neck.

'Wouldn't you like Dilly and me to call you Grandma Reddy?' she asked with her sweetest smile. 'I think we are going to have the best time here, just we three together. I will be the housekeeper, and Dilly must have a good rest, and you shall sit in the sun and tell us about your grandchildren. Doesn't that sound pleasant to you?'

'Very pleasant, indeed,' was Grandma Reddy's answer. Already she had begun to purr, and the entire little house was filled with the cozy, humming sound. 'Now let me tell you something,' she went on with quite a grandmotherly little air. 'Dilly looks to me as if she needed a good hot cup of catnip tea. I will get the catnip. There is a bed of it down behind

the house in a grassy place the other side of the fence.'

'I will make the tea,' cried Mrs. Thimbletop, clapping her hands and jumping to her feet. 'I will make tea for us all. I long to begin housekeeping right straight away. First I will fetch the water from the brook. Then I will blaze a little fire. And then I will make the tea. Lie still, Dilly, and take a little nap until I come back again.'

From the way that Mrs. Thimbletop fell to work you could see she was a born housekeeper. In almost no time she had brewed a steaming pot of catnip tea and filled three of the gold-and-white tea-cups that stood upon the shelf.

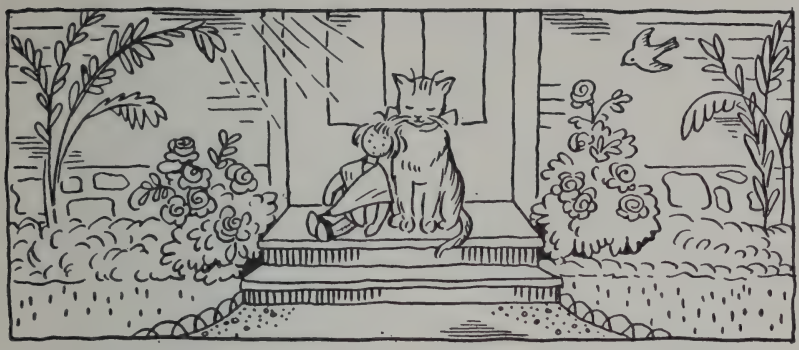
'There now,' said Mrs. Thimbletop, smiling round as they sat sipping their tea. 'Isn't this pleasant, Grandma Reddy? Aren't you happy, Dilly? What did I tell you both?'

Grandma Reddy and Dilly both spoke at once.

Grandma Reddy gave a loud satisfied purr. That was her answer.

'It couldn't be pleasanter,' murmured Dilly from her bed.

'Oh, yes, it could,' said Mrs. Thimbletop, with a nod that nearly tumbled her hat from her head. 'Wait until I make my big apron that covers me from head to foot and really begin to cook.'



## CHAPTER V

### THREE LITTLE HOUSEKEEPERS

THE next morning the three little housekeepers rose bright and early with the morning sun.

Mrs. Thimbletop rattled the stove lids and the pots and pans in fine style and cooked the best breakfast ever eaten, so Dilly thought.

No sooner were the breakfast dishes out of the way and the little white bed neatly made than they all sat down to talk things over and plan what they meant to do.

'Now, Grandma Reddy,' began Mrs. Thimbletop, looking very wide-awake this morning with her silver cap pushed back on her pretty brown curls, 'you speak first. Have you any plan for this morning? What would you like to do?'

'In the morning I usually sit on the door-step in the sun,' was Grandma Reddy's reply. 'I find it a good way to begin the day. It gives me a chance to warm myself through and through and to wash my face. I give a great deal of time to that, for I was brought up to be neat.'

Mrs. Thimbletop nodded and turned next to Dilly, who answered her friend's look with a bright smile. Dilly was happy, you could see at a glance, perhaps the happiest of the three.

'How would you like to sit quietly on the door-step for a little while with Grandma Reddy, Dilly?' asked Mrs. Thimbletop. 'I have found the nicest little red wash-tub and scrubbing-board, and there are clothes-pins and a clothes-line too. So I thought I would put your dress to soak first thing, and wash it out later in the day. I don't think you would be cold if you

wrapped up in your pink shawl and sat in the sun. Do you?'

'No, indeed I don't,' answered Dilly, quite ready to agree to anything her friend might say. 'I should like to sit with Grandma Reddy and think and look about me for a while.'

'As for me,' said Mrs. Thimbletop, standing up to take a few dancing steps and giving a gay little laugh, 'I mean to go straight to work upon that big apron I told you about, Dilly. It won't take me very long. There is everything to work with here.'

It was pleasant on the door-step that warm summer morning, Dilly thought. She sat with her back against the door-post, her pink shawl hugged about her shoulders and her shabby little shoes sticking out straight in front. Beside her sat Grandma Reddy, her white paw and her pink tongue hard at work.

It was quiet and peaceful round Debby's play-house. Now and then a fat bold robin hopped across the grass. A pair of brown rabbits, who had their home not far away, from time to time gave Dilly a glimpse of their tall ears and twitching noses round

this bush or that. But they did not venture near because of Grandma Reddy, whose yellow eyes narrowed and whose claws opened and shut if she caught so much as a whisk of their short white tails. Up in the pear tree, over Dilly's head, a gray squirrel jumped from bough to bough, scolded a moment, and then with a flirt of his tail ran over the roof and out of sight.

Inside the playhouse there were sounds that showed Mrs. Thimbletop had not let the grass grow under her feet. There were the snap of shears and the rustle of cloth. Now and then a spool of thread fell on the floor and rolled merrily about. Once Mrs. Thimbletop upset her dish of pins. But nothing disturbed her good temper. Dilly could hear her humming gayly as she basted up her seams.

Presently Grandma Reddy put her nose between her paws and fell into a light doze. Dilly, watching the great white clouds drift across the summer sky, closed her eyes sleepily and followed Grandma Reddy into the land of dreams.

Dilly was awakened by a gentle shaking of her arm.

She opened and closed her eyes several times in a startled way before she could think where she really was. But once her eyes were opened wide she stared in surprise at the little figure tripping about before her on the door-step in the sun. Grandma Reddy, now wide-awake, was staring too.

Was it Mrs. Thimbletop? No, of course it wasn't. Why, yes, it was. But what a different little Mrs. Thimbletop. No wonder her friend didn't know her at first glance.

For Mrs. Thimbletop was wearing her new apron, a big blue-and-white apron that covered her from her neck to the hem of her own pink frock. She had rolled up her sleeves above her pretty white elbows

and in her hand she brandished a long tin spoon. But what changed Mrs. Thimbletop more than the apron was her hair, the new way she had arranged her dark curling hair.

In the first place Mrs. Thimbletop's head was bare. She had left her thimble hat in the house and that changed her looks very much, indeed. Then, instead of a cloud of brown curls that floated out behind her as she walked, Mrs. Thimbletop had gathered her hair into a soft curly knot at the back of her head. To be sure, little stray curls stood out here and there. They simply would not lie flat in their places. But, after all, Mrs. Thimbletop had done what she had wished and planned.

This Dilly knew as she remembered what Mrs. Thimbletop had said as they came down the road on their way to look for a home.

'You have done just what you wanted to do, haven't you?' said Dilly, looking as pleased as Mrs. Thimbletop herself. 'You have made a big apron that covers you over, you have rolled up your sleeves, and you have twisted your hair into a tight little

knot. How different you look, Mrs. Thimbletop! But, oh, you do look well.'

'Do I?' said Mrs. Thimbletop, smiling with delight and crinkling up her eyes the way Dilly liked. 'Do I look like a housekeeper? Do I look as if I could sew and cook and scrub?'

'Yes, indeed,' answered Dilly eagerly. 'You look as if you could do all those things. No one in the world would ever take you for a Fai——'

'S-s-hush!' interrupted Mrs. Thimbletop hastily. 'Don't say the word. Let me forget it for a little while.'

'All the ladies who keep house wear aprons like yours,' observed Grandma Reddy pleasantly. 'I see them when I go calling on my children and grandchildren round about. You look very well indeed, in my opinion, and as if you were a good cook.'

Here Grandma Reddy, who felt that it must be dinner time, fixed her eyes pointedly on Mrs. Thimbletop's long tin spoon.

To this gentle hint Mrs. Thimbletop was quick to

reply. With a fine flourish of her spoon she invited her friends to walk into the house.

'Dinner is quite ready,' said she, with a happy little laugh. 'I found that Debby's Aunt Deborah has a vegetable garden over there by the fence and I have made us a rich hot parsnip stew. I do hope you will like it. But be sure to tell me the truth.'

Both Dilly and Grandma Reddy did like the parsnip stew. In fact they enjoyed all the dishes that Mrs. Thimbletop cooked for them. Sometimes, to be honest, the cooking didn't turn out quite as Mrs. Thimbletop expected it to do. But Dilly and Grandma Reddy remembered that after all she was a very young housekeeper, that it was even the first time she had ever lived in a house. And they never made unkind speeches, nor pushed away their plates, nor wrinkled up their noses, no matter how strange the cookery might be.

But Grandma Reddy, after a meal, often stole quietly down to a great bed of pepper-grass that grew beside the brook.

'It is good for the heart-burn,' she explained one

day when Dilly found her there. 'Eat a little, do. That cucumber pie we had for dinner to-day doesn't set quite right.'

As for Mrs. Thimbletop, she was in a whirl of joy all day long. She washed, she scrubbed, she polished. There was not a crack nor a cranny in all the playhouse into which she did not poke her nimble fingers and her saucy little nose.

When she washed and ironed Dilly's dress she made it look so well that Dilly declared that she didn't need a new dress at all. And, indeed, with a blue glass button sewed on to take the place of the pin and a pretty lace ruffle basted in the neck, no one could have asked for anything more.

'Then I won't spend my time sewing just now,' said Mrs. Thimbletop one bright morning, when they had been living in the playhouse three or four days. 'It is going to be a hot day. I can tell by the sun. And since the day is suitable I mean to cook the best dinner we have had yet and call it a house-warming. Don't you like the idea?'

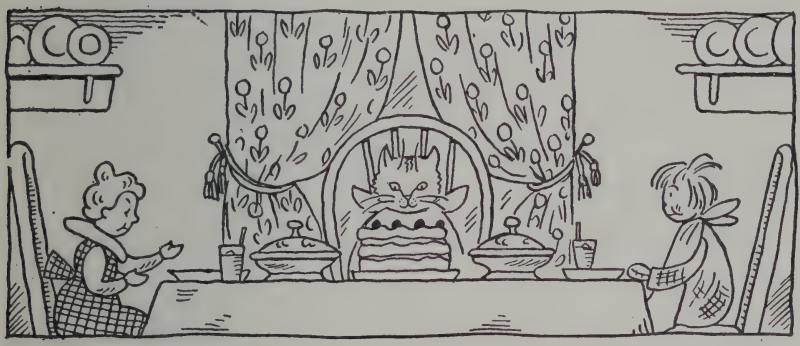
Of course they did. And Dilly picked six raspberries, and peeled and sliced a radish, and stirred the corn pudding until Mrs. Thimbletop sent her out to rest under the lilac bush for fear she would be too tired to enjoy her dinner when the moment came.

As for Grandma Reddy, she slipped quickly down to the bed of pepper-grass and came back with a supply enough for all three.

'We will need it too,' said Grandma Reddy, as she listened to the clatter of the pot lids and heard the mixing and the mashing and the stirring that went on.

Such delicious odors as floated out of the playhouse door! Dilly and Grandma Reddy, sent outside by Mrs. Thimbletop, who said she must not be dis-

tracted by questions the last moment or two, crept nearer and nearer to the door until, when at last Mrs. Thimbletop called them in, they were actually sitting on the door-sill and all but in the room.



It would be hard to describe the good dishes that Mrs. Thimbletop set before them at this housewarming feast.

There were bean soup and corn pudding and raspberry tart. There were baked radishes — invented by Mrs. Thimbletop — garnished with nasturtium leaf sauce. There was a cool drink made of brook water, flavored with leaves of mint, and in the center of the table stood a cake, a wild-blackberry shortcake that really looked too good to eat.

After the first moments of admiration and praise, they sat down at the table. And though their manners were perfect and not one could be said to eat too fast, it was remarkable how quickly the food disappeared.

It was at the end of the feast, when nothing was left but crumbs of blackberry shortcake, that a loud noise startled the guests of the house-warming and sent them crowding to the open door.

Up the driveway came a station wagon and with loud creakings and snortings turned the corner and stopped before the back door of the big white house. In the wagon were trunks, three of them. A man and a woman sat on the front seat.

'It is Pink, Pink and Ashton,' whispered Grandma Reddy, her tail waving wildly and her nose and whiskers twitching with the excitement of it all. 'The family must be coming home. Quick, shut the door before they look down here and see. I will stay outside and listen and tell you what I hear.'

In a twinkling the door was shut fast, though not locked. That would have to wait until the darkness

fell. On the door-step sat Grandma Reddy, her lemon-colored eyes innocently watching all that went on, her pointed ears listening to every sound. Within, perched on the window-sill, Dilly and Mrs. Thimbletop peered from behind the corner of the curtain, well out of sight.

'Oh, how I love this excitement!' whispered Mrs. Thimbletop. 'I shall never go back to that huckleberry pasture and that cow.'

Down from the station wagon stepped Ashton. He was a tall slim brown boy with a bright blue necktie and brighter yellow shoes. Carefully he helped out Pink. She was a very stout colored woman, quite the fattest person that Dilly or Mrs. Thimbletop had ever seen.

Slowly Pink climbed the porch steps and unlocked the back door. She and Ashton together lifted out the trunks from the wagon and carried them into the house. Then Ashton mounted the car and drove it into the garage.

'Pretty nice to get home,' said Pink, looking all about from the top of the porch steps. 'There's

Debby's playhouse. No foot ain't stepped in there since we-all left, I'll be bound. Won't Debby be glad when she gets back and sees that playhouse again! I reckon they'll be here in an hour's time now. I'd better go inside and open the windows and mix up the cornbread for tea.'

An hour's time! Slowly Grandma Reddy rose from the playhouse door-step and with waving tail sauntered round the playhouse to the very back. Then, quick as a flash, Grandma Reddy crouched and slid through her own special hole that took her into the playhouse and under the little white bed.

'Did you hear?' called Grandma Reddy, creeping out from under the bed. 'They will be here in an hour. I will go outside again and come a-running as soon as I have anything to tell.'

Mrs. Thimbletop and Dilly were already hard at work. In a short time all traces of the housewarming feast were gone and you would never have dreamed that three people had been living in the house for almost a week.

'Now, Dilly,' said Mrs. Thimbletop, 'I will stay

out of sight, and you sit there in that little chair all ready if Debby should open the door.'

But there was no step on the path and no hand on the door, and presently Grandma Reddy came squeezing her way in to tell them that Debby would not be down that night.

'They have come,' said Grandma Reddy importantly. 'I saw them myself. But Debby is very tired. She has been riding on the train all day. I heard her mother say that as soon as she had her supper she must go straight to bed.'

'I will slip out then and lock the front door, now that it is dark,' said Mrs. Thimbletop, 'if you will show me how to come in again, Grandma Reddy, your private way. As for you, Dilly, you had better go to bed. We are going to have an exciting day to-morrow when Debby comes.'

## CHAPTER VI

### DEBBY COMES

THE sun that morning peeped into Debby's playhouse and with a long golden finger gently touched Dilly upon either cheek and rested a moment upon the top of her tousled head.

The playhouse was ready and waiting for Debby.

Dilly sat in the center of the room, in a little chair, facing the door. Her gentle heart was beating fast.

'How I do hope that Debby will like me,' thought she. 'I know I shall be fond of her, for everything

that Grandma Reddy tells about her sounds as pleasant as can be.'

On the window-sill behind the curtain stood Mrs. Thimbletop. She was smiling to herself as she peeped now out of the window at the back door of the big white house and now round the edge of the curtain at her little friend. From time to time she waved a gay hand to Dilly and now and then spoke.

'Isn't this exciting?' called Mrs. Thimbletop. 'I simply enjoy it all. This is what I call life.'

Then back behind the curtain darted Mrs. Thimbletop to study again the doors and windows of the big white house.

Grandma Reddy had left the playhouse some time ago.

'I will just go prowling round the big house,' said she, 'and if I hear anything I will come and let you know.'

Now, as Mrs. Thimbletop pressed her tilted nose against the pane, she called out in an excited voice, 'Something is happening. They are opening the

back door. It is Ashton, and he has a broom, and now he is sweeping the porch and down the steps.'

'Don't you think I might come and look too?' asked Dilly from her little chair. 'I would like to see what is going on myself.'

'You could, of course, I suppose,' answered Mrs. Thimbletop doubtfully, 'but I have fixed you so nicely in the chair and your dress is just right. Stay where you are, Dilly, and I will tell you every single thing that happens. I truly will.'

Patient Dilly sat back in her chair with a sigh. No doubt Mrs. Thimbletop was right. At any rate Dilly was too good and gentle not to do as she was bid.

'I see Grandma Reddy,' now called Mrs. Thimbletop. 'She has been in the house and is coming out on the porch. Here comes Pink, too, and she has a saucer of milk for Grandma. Grandma sits there drinking it now. Oh, I do wish Debby herself would come.'

'So do I,' agreed Dilly, thinking that sitting still

was one of the hardest things in the world to do. 'Perhaps she will be coming soon.'

'Now Grandma Reddy has finished her milk,' reported Mrs. Thimbletop, 'and is washing off her face and ears. Oh, Dilly, Dilly, here comes Debby! She is running down the path and Grandma Reddy is with her. Here they both come!'

Dilly could hear the patter of feet on the garden path coming nearer until the door-step was reached.

There was a moment's silence and a voice said, 'Here is the door key, Reddy, just where I left it under the mat.'

Into the keyhole went the key. A twist, a turn, and a push, and into the playhouse stepped Debby with Grandma Reddy at her heels.

Debby was a little girl whom you couldn't help liking the moment you saw her. Both Dilly and Mrs. Thimbletop said so later in the morning when they were alone. And Grandma Reddy — she was so proud of Debby that she actually sat there with a cat smile on her face, showing her little white teeth and with the tip of her pink tongue poking out

of the corner of her mouth. As Mrs. Thimbletop said afterward in private to Dilly, 'You might have thought Debby was one of Grandma Reddy's kitten-grandchildren, she acted so pleased and proud.'

But it is quite true that Debby was a dear little girl. She was plump and round, with a round little face and a round little nose and a pair of round blue eyes. Her hair was brown, and it just wouldn't curl, which made Debby feel rather badly at times, because all the girls in her story books had beautiful curling hair. But she was the only one who minded this, because no one else wanted Debby the least bit different, even to have curling hair. As for Debby's smile, well, her smile really seemed to spread all over her face. Debby's eyes and her cheeks, as well as her lips, went smiling, and even her little round nose seemed to smile a bit too.

It was up into this rosy smiling face that Dilly looked, and at that very moment something pleasant happened to Dilly. To begin with, her little heart stopped beating so fast. She sank back into her chair feeling comfortable and cosy all over, and somehow

the thought of the real little girl Dilly, who had been so kind to her, came into her head.

'They are alike,' thought little Dilly. 'That is why I feel so happy. They are both little girls who love their dolls. I believe Debby will take just as good care of me as Dilly herself.'

And little Dilly looked up into Debby's face with a bright happy smile.

Debby gazed down at Dilly. And though this may sound strange it is perfectly true — what Debby looked at and what Debby saw were two different things. Debby looked down at a shabby little rag doll sitting in a chair at her feet. Though her dress was clean and whole, thanks to Mrs. Thimbletop's nimble fingers, it was faded and old-fashioned and rather the worse for wear. Her shoes were scuffed at heel and toe and the little silver buckles they once bore had disappeared long ago. Dilly's hair stood out as wildly as in the days of Harriet Ann. Mrs. Thimbletop had done her best with a small white brush and comb that she found in the top bureau drawer. But brushing and combing really seemed

to make Dilly's hair look worse. And though Grandma Reddy had gone so far as to offer to use her tongue as she once did to smooth down her own kittens' fur, it had been thought best not to try this but to leave the hair alone. Faded eyes and pale cheeks and lips belonged to the Little Rag Doll, as we know, not to mention a general rain-washed air. But understand, all this is what Debby looked at.

What Debby saw was a lovable, comfortable little rag doll. She was made to be petted and carried and rocked. She was made to be held cosily on one's lap, to be put snugly to bed, or taken to ride in a doll-carriage in the fresh air and sun. Last of all, she was meant to be snuggled down beside a little girl in bed at night when the lights were out and the shadows stole along the wall.

All this Debby saw and much more too. She saw a pair of honest blue eyes that trusted Debby to be both kind and good, and she saw a sweet shy little smile that told of Dilly's good nature and gentle heart.

It took Debby only a moment to see all this. Then

she stooped and gathered Dilly up in her arms.

'You are a dear little dolly,' said she, holding Dilly close. 'I suppose Pink found you in the attic when she cleaned it after we went away. She said if she found any old toys she would put them out here for me. Would you like to be my doll ——'

Here Debby stopped and looked a trifle puzzled, for of course she didn't know Dilly's name.

For a moment every one in the playhouse felt strange. Dilly could hear Grandma Reddy draw in her breath in an anxious gasp. Of course Dilly herself couldn't speak.

As I said, for a moment every one felt strange. Then Mrs. Thimbletop did a wise and sensible thing. From off the window-sill where she stood behind the curtain came Mrs. Thimbletop. Easily and gracefully, as only a fairy could, she floated through the air and stood on Debby's shoulder.

Standing on tiptoe Mrs. Thimbletop whispered in Debby's ear. As it was a fairy whisper, of course it didn't make a sound. Of course, too, Debby didn't feel Mrs. Thimbletop standing on her shoulder nor

could she have seen her if she had turned her head.

But Dilly and Grandma Reddy saw her and could hear her whisper, too.

What Grandma Reddy thought of such surprising behavior would take too long to tell. It is enough to say that for a moment Grandma Reddy's eyes turned black and looked very wild and that every hair on her body stood out perfectly straight.

But Mrs. Thimbletop was whispering in Debby's ear.

'Dilly!' whispered Mrs. Thimbletop. 'Dilly! Her name is Dilly!'

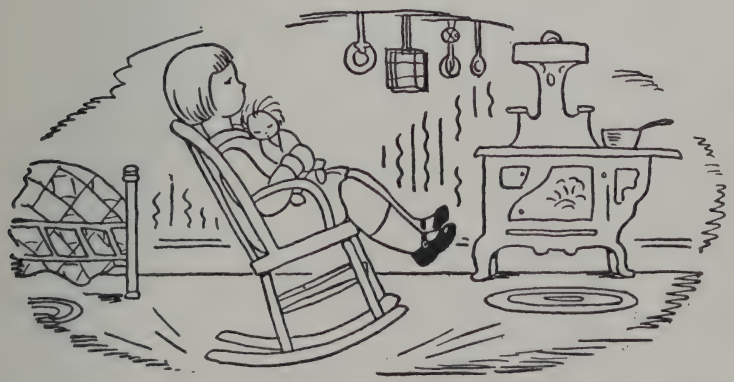
The puzzled look left Debby's face. She smiled

down again at the Little Rag Doll and repeated, 'Would you like to be my doll, Dilly?'

The name slipped as easily from her lips as if she had known Dilly and her name for years and years and years.

Dilly's lips smiled sweetly. Her honest blue eyes looked trustfully up into Debby's face. It was the best answer she could make and Debby seemed to understand.

Mrs. Thimbletop seemed satisfied too. With a nod she disappeared behind the curtain as Debby seated herself in the rocking-chair and cuddled Dilly in her arms.



She rocked the Little Rag Doll gently and patted her upon the cheek.

'I am glad to be home again,' said Debby with a glance all round the room. 'I love this playhouse and I love you too, little Dilly dear. As soon as Rose-Marie, my new doll, is unpacked I will bring her down for you to see. You would never guess what happened when we were away, Dilly. It was a dreadful thing. I felt badly for a long, long time. Some one on the train set a can on top of the trunk where my dolls were packed and the stuff in the can ran into the trunk and spoiled it, every bit. My dolls and all Mother's clothes and mine in the trunk just fell to pieces when Mother lifted them out. So my Uncle John Wilson, where I was visiting, bought me Rose-Marie. He carried her home one night in a box. And I will bring her down as soon as she is unpacked. I must go now. Mother is calling. But I will be back again soon.'

With Debby running up the garden path, Dilly and Mrs. Thimbletop and Grandma Reddy looked at one another without speaking until

they heard the screen door up at the big house shut.

Then Dilly said softly, still smiling because it was so pleasant to be rocked in Debby's arms, 'Isn't she sweet? Don't you like her? But of course I know you do. I do wonder what Rose-Marie is like, don't you?'

Mrs. Thimbletop, already rattling the pots and pans and giving the stove a poke, shook her head.

'I can guess,' said she a trifle sharply.

You see Mrs. Thimbletop had wanted to forget that she was a fairy, and she was not very well pleased that, an hour ago, she had done something that only a fairy could. So it is not surprising that her answer was a little tart.

'Rose-Marie is a fine doll,' went on Mrs. Thimbletop, with a slight toss of her head. 'That is not hard to tell. She is very fine or Debby would have carried her home and not let her be packed in a trunk. Now Debby is a pleasant little girl. I like her. I think she will make you a good mother, Dilly, and I am glad of that. But there is something about Rose-Marie's

name that is too fancy for me. I am afraid we shall have trouble with Rose-Marie before we are through.'

'Oh, no,' said Dilly with a trusting look, 'I don't believe Debby would have a doll who didn't behave herself well.'

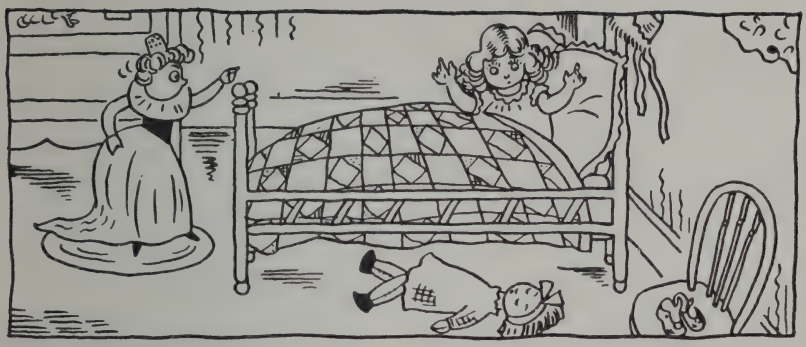
'It won't be the way she behaves when Debby is here,' replied Mrs. Thimbletop, banging the stove lids so that the noise almost drowned the sound of her voice. 'It is what she will do when Debby isn't about.'

'We may like her,' said Dilly hopefully. 'At least I mean to try. What do you think about it, Grandma Reddy? Tell us, do.'

Grandma Reddy sat thinking, her great amber-colored eyes staring at the wall.

'Wait and see,' was all she would say, and in her most grandmotherly fashion too.

But Mrs. Thimbletop noticed that Grandma Reddy was opening and shutting her claws as if she, too, thought they might have trouble with Rose-Marie before they were through.



## CHAPTER VII

### WHAT HAPPENED TO ROSE-MARIE

ROSE-MARIE was a beautiful, big, French doll. She had golden curls, and great brown eyes that opened and shut, and she showed three little pearl-white teeth in a lovely smile.

She wore a beautiful rose-colored dress, made of silk, a coat trimmed with fur, and a bonnet to match. On her feet were bronze slippers, on her hands were kid gloves, actually kid gloves with tiny gilt buttons, and from her ears dangled ear-rings, each with a little pink stone.

She was by far the most beautiful doll that Debby

or Dilly or Mrs. Thimbletop or Grandma Reddy had ever seen.

Rose-Marie behaved well the first morning when Debby carried her down to the playhouse. She shook hands politely with Dilly when Debby showed her how. She remained sweet and smiling when Debby put her straight to bed and told her she had a fever and must stay warm and covered-up. She may have suspected, as did Mrs. Thimbletop, hiding behind the curtain, and Grandma Reddy, on the door-step in the sun, that Debby wanted to play with Dilly and put Rose-Marie to bed to get her out of the way.

You see Dilly was so soft and cuddly to hold in your lap. She fitted nicely into your arm or shoulder as the case might be. While Rose-Marie was a trifle stiff and heavy to hold and so very beautiful that there was always danger of crushing her curls or rumpling her dress.

However it might be, Debby had a happy morning in the playhouse, cooking at the stove, setting the table, and dusting the pretty furniture, all of which

bits of housekeeping Mrs. Thimbletop watched with a pleased but critical eye. Best of all, Debby sat in the cushioned rocking-chair for a long, long time, softly rocking little Dilly to and fro.

But when Debby had gone away from the playhouse Rose-Marie was not pleasant at all. In the first place she proved to be a proud and haughty doll, very hard to get along with, though it must be said that every one tried her best. She thought very well of her looks, which was natural, for she was a beautiful doll. Not even saucy Mrs. Thimbletop wanted to find fault with that. Then, too, Rose-Marie was proud, proud of her clothes, for which no one in the playhouse could blame her, and proud, too, of the city from which she came.

'I come from Paris,' said Rose-Marie, drawing herself away from Dilly, for they lay side by side in bed where Debby had tucked them nicely in. 'Paris! That is my real, true home.'

'What is Paris?' asked innocent little Dilly.

She was much surprised to have Rose-Marie answer her by pushing her out upon the floor.

'Oh!' cried Rose-Marie with a wild shake of her curls. 'I will not lie in bed with a person who does not know what Paris is. What a shabby doll you are! What strange clothes! What hair!'

And she looked at Dilly in such a way that Dilly rolled under the bed in a fright.

Mrs. Thimbletop was angry at this and spoke up bravely for her little friend.

'We think Dilly's hair looks very well, now that Debby has tied a ribbon round it,' said she, stiff as a poker. 'Tell us what Paris is, instead of poking fun.'

Rose-Marie gave Mrs. Thimbletop a scornful look.

'How country!' said she. 'I should know you had lived all your days in a huckleberry patch.' For each of the three friends in turn already had kindly told Rose-Marie the story of her life. 'But I will tell you about Paris. It is a pity for you not to know. Paris is a great and beautiful city where every one looks like me.'

Rose-Marie must have been thinking of the large

doll toy-shop where she had been made. There, every one would look more or less like her.

'I was sorry to leave Paris,' she went on with an air. 'But I had to cross the ocean in a ship so that Uncle John Wilson could buy me for Debby. Oh, Paris, Paris!'

And Rose-Marie moved over into the middle of the bed, leaving no room for Dilly if she had wanted to go back there, which she didn't.

If Rose-Marie paid no respect to Mrs. Thimbletop, you may imagine what her treatment of Grandma Reddy was.

Call a cat Grandma Reddy? Not she! 'Kitty' and 'Puss' were the words she used.

Naturally this angered Grandma Reddy. Indeed she was worked up to such a pitch that she almost forgot the dignity of her years and wanted to hiss and spit like a kitten. But she didn't. She controlled herself. She pulled herself together, though her tail swelled with anger and lashed to and fro, and her yellow eyes turned black.

'Such sauciness!' hissed Grandma Reddy. But

only when she was alone, for she did not want good little Dilly to know how angry she felt.

How pleased Mrs. Thimbletop and Grandma Reddy were when Debby put Rose-Marie in the corner with her face to the wall as she sometimes did! For Debby was mother enough to see that Rose-Marie had a proud and haughty spirit that must be subdued.

And the day, too, that Debby cut a switch from the lilac bush beside the playhouse door because Rose-Marie wouldn't bend her legs to sit down on Debby's lap. If Debby's mother hadn't called her up to the big house at just that moment no one knows what might have happened. Mrs. Thimbletop and

Grandma Reddy almost cried with disappointment and pretended not to hear what Rose-Marie said.

'They never do such things in Paris,' said Rose-Marie, her face very red.

You must not think that Mrs. Thimbletop and Grandma Reddy were cruel or unkind. Quite the contrary. They didn't mind what Rose-Marie did or said to them, or at least they tried not to mind. It was her behavior to good little Dilly that they thought so unfair.

For Rose-Marie grew no more kind to Dilly as the days went by. She still laughed at her looks, she made fun of her clothes, she wouldn't give her even the edge of the bed to lie on no matter how tired Dilly might be.

But good little Dilly was always patient and sweet-tempered no matter how Rose-Marie might choose to behave.

Beside all this, Rose-Marie was boastful. She said she could dance. And she did. She said she could sing too. And she did, only not so well. But at

last one morning she actually said that she could *fly*.

'If you can fly,' said she to Mrs. Thimbletop, 'I can too.'

Mrs. Thimbletop would never have let Rose-Marie know she could fly, because she was so shy about being a Fairy, only of course it came out when they were telling Rose-Marie how Debby learned Dilly's name.

Now this morning Dilly and Mrs. Thimbletop were alone in the playhouse with Rose-Marie. Grandma Reddy was up at the big house prowling round in the cellar while Pink straightened up a shelf of last summer's preserves.

'If you can fly, I can too,' repeated Rose-Marie to Mrs. Thimbletop, climbing up on the window-sill as she spoke. 'Why, they think nothing at all of flying in Paris, you know.'

Mrs. Thimbletop, who knew a good deal about it, shook her head.

'Don't you try it. You are too heavy,' said she. 'Furthermore, your head is made of china and just one fall might be your last. Dilly here is different.

She might practice flying with only a few bumps to show for her pains.'

This good advice only provoked Rose-Marie.

'Dilly fly and I not? Never!' said she.

And in spite of all Dilly and Mrs. Thimbletop could say Rose-Marie declared that she meant to fly across the room.

So Rose-Marie, with a proud little laugh, poised on tiptoe on the window-sill. She spread her arms, she leaped out into the air. And the next moment poor foolish Rose-Marie crashed to the ground, face-forward, and lay very still.

Dilly and Mrs. Thimbletop were too stunned to speak. There was nothing they could do, so they sat right still. They couldn't pick up Rose-Marie. What good would it do if they could? They had no doubt her head was broken. And they couldn't mend it, if it were.

They could only sit very still, and shut their eyes tight, and not look at Rose-Marie, and hope that some one would come very soon and pick her up from the floor.

They had not long to wait. Ashton was raking the grass near the playhouse and he heard the fall. He looked in the open playhouse door and then called to Debby who was eating bread and jam on the back porch steps. Reddy had come up from the cellar and was seated at her side. This was well, for some one might have said that Reddy had pushed Rose-Marie down.

'Debby, your doll's broke,' called Ashton.

And Debby, after one peep at the dreadful sight, went running into the house for Mother and Aunt Deborah to help.

The tears rolled down Debby's cheeks as she stooped to pick her up.

Poor, poor Rose-Marie! Her lovely forehead was cracked in a dozen places. There was a great piece

out of her rosy cheek and another from her dimpled chin. Poor, poor Rose-Marie!

'We can easily buy a new head for your doll the first time Aunt Deborah or I goes down to New York,' said Mother in a comforting voice. 'Meanwhile you can play with the Little Rag Doll.'

Now the sad procession made its way back to the big house where Mother, helped by sober Debby, carefully laid the unfortunate Rose-Marie away in the spare room in an empty dresser drawer.

In the playhouse Ashton picked up the broken bits of Rose-Marie. Then, shutting the door behind him, he went away.

He left Dilly and Mrs. Thimbletop and Grandma Reddy feeling very sad. In spite of Rose-Marie's unpleasant ways it was a dreadful accident to befall any one.

'Perhaps with a new head Rose-Marie will be more agreeable,' suggested Grandma Reddy, as they talked it over again that night when they were alone.

'Yes,' agreed Dilly hopefully, 'and, of course, this new head won't come from Paris. It will come from New York. I heard Debby's mother say so.'

'I am glad of that,' answered Mrs. Thimbletop with a decided nod. 'New York is very different from Paris, I feel sure. Now let us all go to bed.'

Grandma Reddy answered with a long silent yawn.

'We are all tired out,' said she. 'It has been a very trying day.'

'I am glad Dilly will have the whole bed to herself to-night with no one to push her out on the floor,'

Poor, poor Rose-Marie! Her lovely forehead was cracked in a dozen places

whispered Mrs. Thimbletop in Grandma Reddy's ear. 'But Dilly is so good she would never think of that herself!'

And bending over Dilly's pillow the rather sharp Mrs. Thimbletop placed a fairy kiss on Dilly's forehead and breathed a fairy wish in her ear.

'Pleasant dreams the night long, little Dilly,' whispered Mrs. Thimbletop.

## CHAPTER VIII

### DILLY HAS A FRIGHT

DEBBY was going on an errand for Great-Aunt Deborah. She walked slowly and carefully along the road for in one arm she carried a jar of Aunt Deborah's currant-and-raspberry preserve. She was taking it as a present to Aunt Deborah's friend, Madame Fair, and she felt proud to think she was trusted to carry it so far.

'I won't drop it, Aunt Deborah,' promised Debby. 'I truly won't. I will hold it fast and watch every place where I put my feet. I wish I could take Dilly

with me too, for company, and because she never goes anywhere at all.'

'Oh, Debby, do you think you ought to have both arms full?' said Mother, shaking her head.

But Aunt Deborah had settled it.

'Take Dilly, by all means,' said she. 'She needs the change. Debby isn't going to drop the jar.'

So Dilly rode along on Debby's other arm, wearing the pink shawl for ornament, and feeling quite as happy as Debby herself.

Madame Fair was a stately old lady, very tall and thin. It seemed to Debby that she always wore a black silk dress with glittering pins and many thin gold chains hanging about her neck. Her eyes were bright and black, and she had a sharp way of looking at one. But Debby was not at all afraid of her, for once she had sat upon Madame Fair's lap and eaten two cookies when Aunt Deborah had taken her there for a call.

Debby knew her way quite well to Madame Fair's. Straight up the road to the great gateway with posts each having a stone ball on top. Then along the

driveway to the big front door, where you must ring the bell and wait until Simmons opened the door for you. Simmons was the man who waited on table and opened the front door and drove the great car for Madame Fair.

On went Debby, enjoying her walk. She thought almost every moment about the jar of preserve. Did she hold it too tightly or not tightly enough? Was it tipping? Would it spill? Debby meant to do this errand perfectly, so of course she had to keep her mind on the jar.

But once in a while she did stop long enough to watch a great brown-and-gold butterfly flitting on his way, or to sniff the flower-scented air, or to speak to Dilly who rode so happily upon her arm.

'I have on my new dress, Dilly,' remarked Debby, pausing a moment to glance down at her gay new frock. 'Don't you like the little bunches of flowers? Every color, they are. And it has pockets, two of them, and they are deep.'

Debby didn't wait for Dilly to answer. She took

it for granted that Dilly liked her dress. She trudged along and presently spoke again.

'See the black-eyed Susans and the daisies,' said Debby, nodding at the roadside where the flowers swayed gently in the summer breeze and the milkweed and the mullein grew along the low stone wall.

'Here are the gateposts,' said Debby a moment later, turning in and starting along the edge of the wide driveway. 'Look at Madame Fair's flowers, Dilly. My mother thinks they are the most beautiful flowers in town. Be quiet now, for I have to speak up to Simmons and ask to see Madame Fair.'

Dilly was quiet as a mouse while Debby rang the bell and spoke out bravely when Simmons opened the door.

'May I see Madame Fair?' said Debby, looking Simmons in the eye. 'My name is Debby and I have brought a present from my Aunt Deborah for her.'

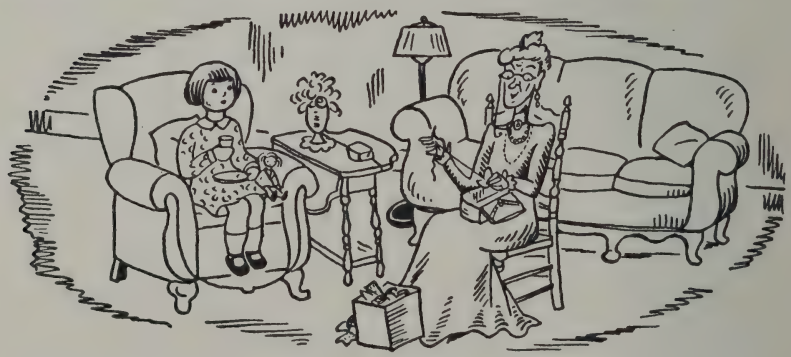
'Walk in, walk in,' answered Simmons with a bow. 'Take a seat inside, Miss Debby, while I go tell Madame Fair.'

Presently Debby found herself following Simmons

down the hall and into the room where Madame Fair sat sewing at fancy work, as Debby could see.

Madame Fair was glad to see Debby. She shook her by the hand and thanked her for the jar of currant-and-raspberry preserve. She pulled forward a chair for Debby. Then she rang a little silver bell that stood on the table at her side.

'Simmons,' said Madame Fair, when Simmons appeared in answer to the bell, 'bring a glass of milk and a plate of cookies for Miss Debby, please.'



While Debby ate her cookies and drank her milk she and Madame Fair talked pleasantly together.

Debby told Madame Fair about Dilly and the playhouse and Rose-Marie. She even went so far

as to tell of the accident to her mother's trunk and the sad fate of all Debby's dolls.

In her turn Madame Fair showed Debby what she was making for fancy work. It was a small needle-book, shaped like a sun-bonnet, and Debby thought it very pretty indeed. In front of Madame Fair stood a great box full of samples of colored silk — pink and blue and rose and yellow and red and green, every color in the world, Debby thought. She wished she could feel of the scraps and turn them over. Probably the prettiest ones of all were at the very bottom of the box. But of course Debby wouldn't ask such a thing, not she.

Soon Debby slipped from her chair and said she must go. She remembered that Mother had charged her over and over again not to stay too long.

'Wait just a moment,' said Madame Fair, rising too. 'I want to send your Aunt Deborah my recipe for spiced prunes. I promised it to her long ago. Wouldn't you like to look through the box of silks, Debby, while I am copying the recipe down?'

Left alone Debby eagerly tossed over the samples

of silk. Just as she thought, the prettiest ones were at the very bottom of the box. How beautiful they were! Silks and velvets and satins of every shade and hue. Glowing rose and delicate pink, flaming scarlet and shimmering blue! Pieces of green, dark as the grass or pale as a wave of the sea! Yellow scraps as delicate as Aunt Deborah's tea roses or rich as the orange black-eyed Susans blooming along the side of the road.

But there was one piece of silk that especially pleased Debby's fancy. On one side it was a lovely blue, a rich deep blue like the sky on a clear summer

day, but turn it over and it glittered like silver in the sun. It was really the most beautiful piece of silk that Debby had ever seen. She rubbed it between

her fingers, she pressed it against her cheek. She looked at it close by, she held it far off, and even as she looked it changed from blue to silver and back to blue again.

'Oh, Dilly, isn't it beautiful?' murmured Debby. 'How I wish it was mine!'

She rubbed it between her fingers again and at that very moment she heard Madame Fair's step in the hall.

Now how this happened it would be hard to say. Of course Debby knew there was only one thing to do with that scrap of silk — put it straight back in the box where it belonged. But instead of that, quick as a flash Debby slipped it into her pocket!

Then she turned with Dilly in her arms, took the paper from Madame Fair, said good-bye nicely with a polite curtsey, and started out for home.

Debby walked down the driveway. She didn't talk to Dilly. She didn't even look her in the face.

Debby turned into the highway. The black-eyed Susans and the daisies still nodded in the breeze, the bushes still swayed and beckoned in a friendly

way, but somehow to Debby it didn't seem so pleasant as before.

She didn't touch the scrap of silk in her pocket but it seemed to burn there like a red-hot coal. She actually looked down to see if there were a hole in her gay new frock. But no! all she saw were the tiny bunches of bright flowers and a glint of blue and silver at the bottom of one of the pockets of which she had been so proud.

Debby stole a glance at Dilly. Did she look sad? Surely Dilly's happy little smile was gone.

'I wish I hadn't,' said Debby miserably. 'I don't want it a bit. I don't like it at all.'

Debby's throat grew tight. Her eyes felt hot. She knew in a minute she was going to cry.

'What will Mother and Aunt Deborah think?' said Debby to herself with quivering lip. 'I did the errand. I didn't drop the jar. And now I've spoiled it all. Oh, what will Mother say?'

And a great tear rolled down Debby's cheek and fell on the top of little Dilly's head.

Debby's steps grew slow. She stood still in the

road. And then Debby turned herself round and began walking back to Madame Fair's as fast as she could go.

She was hurrying along, when out of the bushes at the roadside pushed three children, a girl and two boys, and at sight of the little girl Dilly grew cold and stiff with fright.

It was Harriet Ann. There was no mistaking her. Of that Dilly was sure.

Dilly crouched down as best she might in Debby's arms. She tried to twist round and hide her face against Debby's neck. But, of course, there she was, in plain sight. Any one who looked might see her, there was no denying that. Dilly's heart almost

stopped beating. Her head swam round and round. Again her legs felt weak and queer as they had one day in the huckleberry patch, as if she had lost the cotton and couldn't stand up.

But Harriet Ann was laughing and waving a brand new pail. Every moment Dilly expected her to call out, 'Why, there is my old doll.'

But instead Harriet Ann called, 'Hello, Debby. Come along with us. We're going berrying.'

So Harriet Ann and Debby were friends. At least they knew one another. Dilly had never thought of such a thing.

Debby only shook her head and began to run.

'I can't,' said she. 'I have to go back to Madame Fair's.'

Harriet Ann and the boys stood staring after her down the road. The boys were two of the minister's boys, the six of them with whom Grandma Reddy had lived, but this, of course, Dilly didn't know.

'Wait!' called Harriet Ann. 'Wait, and go berrying with us! Do!'

Then the boys and Harriet Ann began running

down the road too. Dilly could see them as she bounced up and down on Debby's arm.

Debby's eyes were full of tears. She could scarcely see. She lifted her hands to brush the tears away, and what should she do but let Dilly slip to the

ground! On ran Debby, so upset and unhappy that she didn't miss Dilly at all.

Now can you imagine how Dilly felt as she lay there in the grass at the side of the road? Of course she expected nothing less than to have Harriet Ann clutch her by the arm and begin at once to drag and bump her toward home. And if Harriet Ann didn't spy her, surely those two sharp-eyed little boys would. Dilly said later that she couldn't think of telling her

feelings as she lay there. They were simply too painful to be put into words.

She heard Harriet Ann call out again.

'Oh, Debby, wait! I'm coming to play with you some day soon.'

She heard Debby's footsteps growing fainter up the road.

She heard Harriet Ann and the boys coming nearer and nearer and nearer!

And then — she heard the footsteps going farther and farther away.

And no voice shouted, 'Why, here is my old doll in the grass!' And no hand clutched her by the arm and began dragging and bumping her over the road.

For the next few moments little Dilly didn't think or feel at all. She just lay there under the milkweed plant where she fell. But when she felt a little better she dragged herself over to the low stone wall and there she hid herself in a tangle of blackberry vines.

'In case Harriet Ann comes back,' said Dilly faintly. And, after that, for a long while she said no more.

Now Debby ran on and on. She didn't miss Dilly. She didn't answer Harriet Ann. All she wanted to do was to give back that scrap of silk to Madame Fair.

Debby turned in at the two great posts of the driveway. She ran straight across the lawn. It is a mercy she didn't tumble into the flower beds because her eyes were full of tears. She ran up the great front steps. She didn't ring the bell. She didn't want to see Simmons at all.

The front door opened at Debby's push, and down the hall she went and into the room where Madame Fair still sat busy with her needle and her bits of silk.

'Here!' said Debby, her face all red and puckered and marked with tears. 'Here! This is yours!'

And out of her pocket Debby pulled the blue and silver scrap of silk.

'It's yours,' said Debby again, beginning to cry out loud. 'I took it. I took it away. But I brought it back.'

Now Debby was crying so hard that she couldn't speak another word.

But Madame Fair understood what had happened without any more talking on Debby's part.

'I am so glad you brought it back, Debby,' said she, taking the bit of silk and thrusting it down in the big box quite out of sight. 'You did just exactly right.'

Then Madame Fair took Debby on her lap and let her cry, all over the beautiful bright pins and gold chains, until Debby felt better. Madame Fair washed Debby's face, too, and brushed her hair.

'I was going out for a little drive,' said Madame Fair, 'and you must come with me.'

So Madame Fair and Debby, with Simmons driving, went home the long way — not the way Debby had walked, but the long way, 'all around the block.' Only of course it wasn't like a city block. It was country roads and green fields and once a farm house, with ducks and chickens, and cows lying under the trees.

When they reached home, Debby's home, Madame Fair said she wouldn't come in.

'Give my love to your mother and Aunt Deborah.

And don't forget the recipe for spiced prunes.' For Debby had held the paper tightly all the while. 'You must come and see me soon again,' said Madame Fair. And she kissed Debby good-bye.

Straight into the house ran Debby to tell Mother and Aunt Deborah all that had happened and what she had done.

'But I didn't keep it,' said Debby over and over, as she told about the scrap of silk. 'I didn't keep it, and Madame Fair said I did just right.'

And in all the excitement no one missed little Dilly who had been left lying far up the road under the blackberry vines.

## CHAPTER IX

### WHERE IS DILLY?

DILLY lay hidden in the blackberry vines for a long, long time. She didn't want to move. She wasn't able to think. She waited until she felt stronger, until her head stopped whirling round and her legs stopped feeling limp, and then Dilly began to plan what she meant to do.

'Debby mustn't find me,' said Dilly firmly, though her heart was very sad at the thought. 'Like as not she will meet Harriet Ann again on the way home. What I must do is to find my way back to the play-

house. I can talk things over there with Mrs. Thimbletop and Grandma Reddy. They will be glad to help me, I know.'

So little Dilly started off to find her way back to the playhouse. She didn't dare walk along the roadside for fear of meeting some one she knew. There was nothing left, then, but to go through the woods. So pulling her pink shawl tightly round her shoulders Dilly began to clamber over the low stone wall.

This was hard work, as Dilly soon found. But by great pulling and stretching and clutching of the vines she managed to lift herself to the top of the wall. Once there, it was a simple matter to fling herself to the ground on the other side.

It was a pleasant little wood in which Dilly found herself, mossy and green under foot, while overhead the leafy boughs made a screen from the warm rays of the afternoon sun.

If Dilly's mind had been at peace she might have enjoyed her walk.

'But I feel so fidgety,' said Dilly, twitching at her shawl. 'Suppose Harriet Ann and those two boys

came rushing on me in here. Good gracious! What's that?'

It was only a saucy little chipmunk frisking along the stone wall. But his chattering made Dilly run blindly over the mossy ground until she tripped on a root and sat down hard.

'Oh, dear!' said Dilly. 'Oh, dear!'

She gave a fearful glance all round. Was that Harriet Ann's blue dress that she saw flashing through the trees? A loud squawk made Dilly hide her face in her hands. But peeping out she spied the crested head of a blue jay on a bough near by, and Dilly shook herself briskly and straightened up her back.

'Nonsense! It is only a bird,' said Dilly bravely.

'Harriet Ann and those boys were going for berries. There are no huckleberries in here.'

On her feet again, in and out among the tree trunks went Dilly, looking carefully round her as she walked.

'If only I knew where I was,' said Dilly. 'If only I had some one to tell me the way.'

In answer to her wish Dilly heard a voice, a friendly, pleasant voice, with even a little chuckle in it, as if there were a joke it wanted to share. And the next moment Dilly herself had seen the joke and with a smile was hurrying toward the sound.

'It is the brook I hear,' said Dilly. 'It is the brook. If I follow the brook I shall find my way home.'

Louder and louder sang the little brook. It was calling Dilly with all its might.

Dilly scrambled over roots and stumps and stones. Once she slipped and fell, tearing a long rent in her frock. But she held her skirt together with one hand and hurried on.

There was the brook at last, rippling and clear and brown, looking like an old friend to Dilly, for

it ran, you know, back of the playhouse, at the foot of Aunt Deborah's garden plot.

'Now,' said Dilly, stopping short and pressing her hand to her head, 'I must think. It would be dreadful if I followed the brook the wrong way and came out at the place where Harriet Ann goes to play.'

So Dilly stood thinking, while the brook sang cheerily as it rippled over the little stones and round the big ones, going steadily on its way. Something in the song of the brook made Dilly feel cool and quiet and sure that she would reach home at last.

'We came along the road this way,' said Dilly, talking aloud to clear her thoughts and pointing with a stubby little hand, 'and the brook goes the same way as the road. That I know. So if I follow the brook this way and keep my eyes open for Grandma Reddy's pepper-grass patch and the red chimney on the playhouse, I shall find my way home.'

Bravely Dilly started forward. The way might be long and the walking rough but at least she was on the homeward trail.

Over moss and trailing vines and slippery stones Dilly clambered. She went slowly, for she had to pick her way. But she moved steadily along until she came to a great high stone that jutted out over the water and was surrounded by bushes on the side toward the wood.

'Can I go round this stone?' asked Dilly, still talking aloud, for she found her own voice good company in this lonely spot. 'No, I can't. Then I will climb over it.'

And this Dilly proceeded to do.

It was not an easy task, for as fast as she scrambled up she slipped down again. The stone was rough

and scratched her hands and knees. But Dilly tried again and again and at last found herself poised at the very tip-top of the rock.

'It won't be so hard climbing down,' thought Dilly hopefully.

'Ker-chunk! Ker-chunk!'

This loud, strange noise sounded in Dilly's ear. She gave a start and a jump and the next moment, with a splash, Dilly fell feet first into the brook. Off came her little pink shawl and away it floated on the current, on and on, round the bend, and out of sight.

Dilly was not hurt. The water was shallow here. But she was dreadfully jarred and frightened. Her skirt was covered with mud and she was soaking wet. She sat quite still for a moment, too stunned to move, and from under a stone across the brook she spied the green head and the wide mouth of a great old grandfather frog.

'It was you,' called Dilly. 'I know it was you. Why didn't you wait till I was off the stone? Foolish, I call it. My pretty pink shawl!'

Without another look or word for the frog, whose

great eyes popped in his head at being spoken to in such a fashion, Dilly rose from the water and, holding her head very high, waded round the stone and up on the ground again.

There, with her back turned to the frog, she squeezed the water out of her skirt as best she could and went on her way.

'Dear me,' said gentle Dilly, when the turn in the brook hid her from the frog, 'wasn't I cross! I shouldn't have spoken so. I hope I didn't hurt his feelings. But really he ought to have more sense. My pretty pink shawl!'

Dilly's wet skirt was heavy. She was tired, too. She had had a hard afternoon. But she pressed on, and presently she spied a great bed of pepper-grass toward which she ran.

'If this is Grandma Reddy's pepper-grass I am near home,' said Dilly. 'I will take a piece, anyway, just to hearten me a bit.'

Chewing on the pepper-grass, which did have a warming, soothing effect, Dilly gazed up and round about.

Suddenly she gave a little cry.

'There it is!' cried Dilly. 'There is our chimney!'

And over the ground stepped Dilly, faster than you might think, toward the bright red chimney of the playhouse that gleamed through the green of the trees.

Round about the playhouse crept Dilly. She had almost reached the front door when all at once she couldn't go a step farther. Her legs just gave out.

So Dilly lay down under the lilac bush and closed her eyes.

It was there that Grandma Reddy and Mrs. Thimbletop found her.

'Where have you been, Dilly?' began Mrs. Thimbletop sharply. 'Look at your dress. What has happened to you?'

'Debby came home an hour ago, riding in a great car,' said Grandma Reddy. 'I saw at once that she didn't have you and I knew something was wrong. I have been sitting out at the front gate watching for you ever since.'

'Oh, dear,' said Dilly faintly, 'my pink shawl is

gone. I have had a dreadful afternoon. Let me tell you about it.'

So Dilly told her story slowly, with many little pauses for rest.

'I shall have to go away somewhere,' finished Dilly sadly, 'for there is no telling what moment Harriet Ann won't walk in and catch me. She said she was coming to play with Debby soon.'

'Indeed you shan't go away,' cried Mrs. Thimbletop and Grandma Reddy at once. 'The playhouse wouldn't be the same if you were not here.'

Dilly shook her head.

'Harriet Ann,' said she.

'You leave Harriet Ann to me,' said Grandma Reddy, looking very fierce. Her eyes had turned black, her tail was lashing the ground, and she slowly opened and shut her claws. 'I will scratch her well if she comes here to take you away.'

'No, Dilly, you mustn't go,' agreed Mrs. Thimbletop. 'You mustn't be afraid of Harriet Ann. If she comes here I'll — I'll — put a fairy wish on her,' said Mrs. Thimbletop triumphantly, as if there was no more to be said. 'I simply couldn't bear it if you went away.'

'You could hide, too, if she came,' said Grandma Reddy, with narrowing eyes. 'I have a hidey-hole that nobody knows, Dilly. I will tell it to you, if you like. I will keep watch for her too. I must go now, this very minute. They are having fish for dinner and I ought not be out of the kitchen just now.'

'My pie!' exclaimed Mrs. Thimbletop, springing to her feet. 'I made you a pie, Dilly, a huckleberry pie. It is in the oven now. It will burn. My pie!'

Left alone, Dilly sat up under the lilac bush. Several times she slowly shook her head.

'If I stay it will only make trouble,' said she. 'Sooner or later Harriet Ann is sure to come. Even if she doesn't I shan't have a moment's peace. It would never do for Grandma Reddy to scratch her. It would throw Grandma into deep disgrace. What Mrs. Thimbletop means by putting a fairy wish on her I don't know. But it sounds perfectly dreadful to me. No, it won't do.'

Slowly Dilly rose to her feet. She looked longingly at the little playhouse. Sadly she sniffed Mrs. Thimbletop's huckleberry pie.

'Good-bye,' whispered Dilly. 'Good-bye.'

Not half an hour later Mrs. Thimbletop and Grandma Reddy met again beneath the lilac bush.

'Where is Dilly?' cried Mrs. Thimbletop, staring at the empty spot under the bush.

'Where is Dilly?' echoed Grandma Reddy, staring too.

It was true. Dilly was gone.

Now where was Dilly?

## CHAPTER X

### GRANDMA REDDY TAKES A WALK

IT was not until the next morning that Debby remembered about Dilly and then such a search began as was never known before.

'Think when you had her last,' said Mother. 'You carried her when you started for Madame Fair's, I know.'

'Yes,' said Debby, 'and I had her till I went back the second time. I don't remember after that at all.'

So Debby and Mother walked over to Madame Fair's. They looked in the grass all the way on both sides of the road.

At Madame Fair's they all three looked, Debby and Mother and Madame Fair, through the rooms where Debby had been, up and down the driveway, and over the lawn. Madame Fair even sent Simmons out with the great wooden rake to see if he couldn't find Dilly among the bushes and shrubs. But no Dilly.

At home Aunt Deborah looked through the playhouse and round about. She walked among the flower-beds and up and down the paths. Ashton had been busy in the vegetable patch and as he worked he peeped under cabbage leaves and through the rows of corn. But no Dilly.

'Dolls is queer,' said Ashton, leaning on his hoe

and gazing up at the sky. 'That doll might be anywhere, I say.'

Suddenly he slapped his leg.

'The chimney!' shouted Ashton, pointing to the scarlet chimney on the playhouse roof. 'That's where she is, I'll be bound.'

Ashton dragged the tall ladder out of the tool-shed. Up the side of the playhouse he climbed. Grinning, he peered into the chimney, which was not a real chimney at all, you know, and then he solemnly turned and shook his head.

'No, ma'am,' he called to Aunt Deborah waiting below, 'no, ma'am, that doll ain't here.'

It was Pink who thought of the brook and who walked down to see, Pink who was so fat that she seldom stepped her foot outside the kitchen door. And there in the brook Pink found the little pink shawl, caught on a fallen branch, and came puffing and panting back to whisper to Aunt Deborah behind the pantry door.

'For the land's sake don't tell Debby till we find that doll-baby for sure,' wheezed Pink. 'Her heart's

broke now, 'thout any drownin's. You send that Ashton down to look round the posts of the bridge. Now let me tell you, mebbe that doll's held down there. If so be, I'll dry her out and iron her out and we'll give her back to Debby as good as new.'

Ashton, brave in rubber boots and armed with a long pole, slipped down to the bridge and poked earnestly about, to the great fright of the silver minnows and the frogs. He even waded up and down the brook, poking and peering here and there, but he saw no little rag doll.

You may be sure that Mrs. Thimbletop and Grandma Reddy made a search of their own in places no one else would dream of looking. Mrs. Thimbletop even let the housework go.

'I can't think of cooking,' said she, 'I am so upset. I would sugar the soup and salt the pudding, I know.'

As for Grandma Reddy, she left untouched her saucer of milk on the back porch steps. This was unheard of. It made Pink come out and call, 'Reddy, Reddy, Reddy! Come, Reddy, Reddy!' until Grandma Reddy ran hastily up and drank the milk, just to make Pink stop.

Neither Mrs. Thimbletop nor Grandma Reddy slept well that night. And in the morning they felt no better, for now where should they look next?

At least that is the way Mrs. Thimbletop felt. Grandma Reddy seemed to have some plan in her mind.

In the first place she ate a good breakfast, as if she needed strength for what lay before her. Then she sat down to make herself neat and clean. She washed her face and her paws, smoothing down her fur with a wise and knowing air, as if she knew something she wouldn't tell.

Mrs. Thimbletop burned to know what was in Grandma Reddy's mind.

'Are you going out this morning?' asked she, hoping her question would make Grandma Reddy tell her what she wanted to know.

'Yes,' answered Grandma Reddy, polishing off her right front boot.

'Are you going far?' asked Mrs. Thimbletop next.

'Quite far,' answered Grandma Reddy, twisting round to reach her left hind sock.

Mrs. Thimbletop felt she was getting nowhere at all.

'I shall ask her right out,' said she to herself. 'There is no harm in that.'

'Are you going to look for Dilly?' said Mrs. Thimbletop plainly. 'Tell me, do.'

'Yes,' answered Grandma Reddy, twisting herself into a ball and using her rough pink tongue with skill.

Mrs. Thimbletop could bear no more.

'Speak out, can't you?' said she, stamping her

foot. 'You are just like Daisy the cow. Where in the world do you think Dilly is?'

'I don't know,' said Grandma Reddy, sitting up, her toilet finished, and looking soberly into Mrs. Thimbletop's face. 'But this is what I can't get out of my mind. I am afraid Dilly has been picked up and carried off by Harriet Ann.'

'Oh, dear! Oh, dear!' moaned Mrs. Thimbletop, pressing her hands together. 'Perhaps she has.'

'Yes, perhaps she has,' agreed Grandma Reddy. 'Perhaps she is hanging upside down from some bedpost or door-knob this very minute. I don't have a moment's peace for thinking of it. And so I mean to go and see.'

'What!' exclaimed startled Mrs. Thimbletop. 'You mean to go to Harriet Ann's house? Oh, let me go too!'

'No, ma'am,' said Grandma Reddy firmly. 'I am going to slip into that house as if I were a stray cat and have a look around. And I am going alone!'

There was nothing more for Mrs. Thimbletop to say. She watched Grandma Reddy start and waved her a brave farewell. Then Mrs. Thimbletop hastened to put the teapot on the stove.

'She will need a cup of catnip tea,' said Mrs. Thimbletop wisely, 'when she comes home from Harriet Ann's.'

Grandma Reddy made her way straight toward the house where Harriet Ann lived. Of course she knew where it was. Hadn't she lived near by all her life, and didn't her children and grandchildren live all over the town?

As she trotted quietly along there were several points that Grandma Reddy went over in her mind.

'First of all,' said she to herself, 'I shall remember that I am a Grandmother and that I should be

treated with respect. Children like Harriet Ann and the minister's boys need to be kept in their place. Then, too, no matter what happens, I will not scratch Harriet Ann. I shall be calm and quiet, but very firm.'

Grandma Reddy pressed steadily on.

She passed a lady who carried a gay red umbrella to shield her from the rays of the sun.

'Harriet Ann's mother,' said Grandma. 'The red umbrella is pretty, just as Dilly said.'

Presently she found herself slipping quietly in at Harriet Ann's front door. This was easy to do because Harriet Ann usually left the door open behind her wherever she went.

Grandma Reddy stole like a shadow through the living-room, the dining-room, the pantry, and peered round the kitchen door.

'That is Annie,' said she, looking at the back of a maid who was briskly beating something in a great yellow bowl. 'She will be kept busy for a long while, I hope.'

Upstairs crept Grandma Reddy. She kept close to the wall, meaning to flatten herself and dive and run if any one came.

There was no one upstairs, so far as Reddy could see. She walked from room to room, jumping softly upon beds and chairs the better to gaze about. Bedposts and door-knobs she studied well. She even searched under the beds and poked her nose behind closet doors. But there was not a trace of Dilly to be seen.

There were toys tumbled in a corner — a bat and a ball, a fishing net, a jumping rope, and skates. But nothing that looked at all like a little rag doll.

'She is certainly not here,' said Reddy at last, walking out of a closet where all she found was an

untidy work-basket hidden in a corner behind a box. 'I may as well go home.'

But oh, Reddy, Reddy, look where you are walking! Straight into Harriet Ann who was standing outside the closet door.

'Here, kitty, kitty,' called Harriet Ann in a friendly mood. 'Come, puss, puss! What a pretty cat!'

But Reddy acted as if she didn't hear.

Slowly she moved along the wall, her eyes fixed on the bedroom door. A few steps more, a little nearer the door, and like a streak of lightning Reddy would be down the stairs, out of the door, and on her way toward home.

But alas! Harriet Ann had her eye on the door too.

'Come, puss, puss,' said Harriet Ann again, standing on the door-sill and blocking Reddy's way. 'Come and take a ride, pussy. Be a nice pussy, do. I have a little wagon and I will wrap you in a shawl. We will play you are my baby and I will take you for a ride.'

'Harriet Ann's baby indeed, and me a Grandmother,' thought Reddy.

Her handsome whiskers curled in scorn. Harriet Ann didn't know this. She thought Reddy wanted to sneeze.

'I will wrap you up so you won't catch cold,' coaxed Harriet Ann. 'Come, pussy, come.'

All this while Reddy was slowly edging toward the door.

'I must be calm,' thought Reddy. 'I must be calm. But I must *run!*'

And run she did, past Harriet Ann who swooped down and all but caught Reddy in her skirt.

Like a flash Harriet Ann was after Reddy and a chase began in real earnest.

Reddy was strange and couldn't find the stairway. In and out of the bed-rooms they flew, Reddy leaping lightly over chairs and tables, Harriet Ann tossing stools and chairs aside that were in her way.

The stairs at last! Down went Reddy in a long low streak. But sad to tell the front door had blown shut and Reddy was forced to race through the living-

room, round the dining-room table, and into the kitchen under startled Annie's feet, with Harriet Ann all the while close at her heels.

'Good gracious me!' shrieked Annie, all but dropping the big yellow bowl. 'What will you be doing next, Harriet Ann? A cat, is it? I thought 'twas a monkey.'

But no one stopped to listen to what Annie thought.

Upstairs again raced Grandma Reddy. Her heart was pounding, her breath was coming short. It is true that Grandma Reddy was not so young nor so slim as she once had been.

As for remembering that she was a Grandmother and so to be treated with respect, or putting Harriet Ann in her place, Reddy had no time to think of those things at all.

At the top of the stairs Reddy slipped on the rug and went sliding over the polished floor. This gave Harriet Ann a chance. She stretched out her hand and all but caught Reddy's tail.

From the corner of her eye Reddy spied a half-open window. Quick as a flash she was up on the window-sill. The next moment she had dropped to the flat roof of the porch not far below.

But Harriet Ann was close behind. It was as easy, almost, for her to climb out of the window as for Reddy herself.

On the edge of the porch roof Reddy gathered herself for a jump. It was a long way down to the lawn beneath and Reddy hadn't done any climbing and jumping for many a day. But what else could she do? Fall into Harriet Ann's hands? Play she was a baby?

'A baby! And me with grandchildren all over the

town!' thought Reddy. 'Never! I couldn't keep from scratching her, I know.'

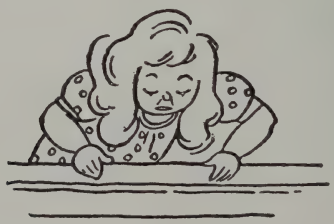
Now Harriet Ann's footsteps began to crackle as she tried to tiptoe over the tin roof.

Reddy pulled herself together. There was no time to be lost.

Whiz! And down through the air went Reddy!

Scoot! And she was under a bush!

Only a moment to get her breath and to glance up at Harriet Ann's red face framed in flying hair, peering over the edge of the roof. Then off for



home trotted Grandma Reddy, so upset that she passed the home of her eldest daughter without even turning her head.

Grandma Reddy's look was so strange when at last she reached home that Mrs. Thimbletop hastily

threw the cushion from the rocking-chair on to the floor and made Reddy lie down upon it at once.

'Quiet and catnip are what you need,' said Mrs. Thimbletop.

This was true. For after a rest and a nap and many refreshing sips of tea Grandma Reddy was able to tell her story to Mrs. Thimbletop, who sat on the floor beside her and drank in every word.

'My pride and my dignity are hurt,' finished Reddy solemnly. 'To think that a Grandmother should have to run such a race! And I am jarred all over. I haven't jumped so far in years, though I used to be one of the best jumpers in town. I shall be stiff and sore to-morrow, I know. But it is worth it all to find out that Dilly isn't with Harriet Ann.'

'Yes, it is,' agreed Mrs. Thimbletop, rubbing faithful Reddy's head and wishing she could hear her purr as she did when Dilly was at home. 'But where in the world is Dilly?'

That evening Debby asked the same question as she sat on the playhouse door-step with Grandma

Reddy brushing round her feet and Mrs. Thimbletop close by, but unseen.

'Where is Dilly?' said Debby. 'Oh, how I wish I knew where she was!'

'So do I,' answered Mrs. Thimbletop earnestly.

'So do I,' answered Grandma Reddy, gingerly nursing her sore little velvet paws.

But their answers were spoken so softly that Debby didn't hear a single word.

## CHAPTER XI

### MRS. THIMBLETOP GOES CALLING

'THERE is no use talking,' said Mrs. Thimbletop, 'I am at my wits' ends about Dilly. I am going to call on Daisy the cow.'

'Do you think she may know something about Dilly?' asked Grandma Reddy, whose front left paw was still a little sore from her race with Harriet Ann.

'No, I don't,' replied Mrs. Thimbletop. 'I am sure she won't. Daisy was agreeable, but she never had the news. But with Dilly gone all these days and no

word about her yet I am ready to do anything, anything at all.'

So Mrs. Thimbletop made ready to go and call upon Daisy the cow.

First of all she took off her big blue apron.

'Daisy wouldn't know me if I wore this,' said she.

Then she shook out her curly hair from the tight little knot at the back of her head and made it float from under her silver hat like a soft brown cloud.

'Now, I am off,' said Mrs. Thimbletop. 'Don't expect me until you see me. I don't know just what I shall do nor where I shall go.'

The huckleberry patch looked just as Mrs. Thimbletop remembered it. The berries were pretty well picked off the bushes, but otherwise there was no change.

The cow Daisy, however, was much more wide-awake and cheerful, Mrs. Thimbletop found.

'Moo! Moo!' said Daisy in quite a lively fashion. She was plainly glad to see her old friend Mrs. Thimbletop again. 'Moo! Moo! How are you?'

'Very well,' answered Mrs. Thimbletop briskly.

'I see you are looking well too. What is the news, Daisy? Has anything been happening round here?'

Daisy thought for a moment, her kind brown eyes staring past Mrs. Thimbletop's head. 'There is plenty of clover this year,' said Daisy. 'The field is full.'

'Yes, I can see that,' answered Mrs. Thimbletop. 'Anything else?'

'The huckleberries are picked,' said Daisy after another pause.

'Yes,' answered Mrs. Thimbletop, 'I can see that too. Anything else?'

'There is a lady sitting in the huckleberry pasture,' said Daisy brightly. 'She comes every day to sew.'

'She does?' said Mrs. Thimbletop, climbing on top of a clover blossom to peer into the next field. 'Yes, I see her. I don't know who she is. I will go look her over in a moment. Daisy, have you seen anything of my friend Dilly? You remember her, don't you? She was here once in the huckleberry patch with me.'

'I remember her,' replied Daisy. 'But she hasn't

been round here since you left. I know, too, for I have been watching for you to come back.'

'You have?' said Mrs. Thimbletop, feeling touched and pleased. 'I didn't know you liked me so well. I will come up and see you soon again, if you wish. You had quite a little news to-day, Daisy, didn't you? You are almost a gossip, I am afraid.'

Daisy only stared at Mrs. Thimbletop. She didn't know what a gossip was.

This made Mrs. Thimbletop feel impatient and she rose to go.

'I do wish you knew something of my friend Dilly,' said she. 'Now I must step down and see that lady in the huckleberry patch.'

Mrs. Thimbletop ducked under the fence that separated the clover field from the huckleberry pasture. As she stooped, the lowest bar of the fence struck her hat and sent it flying off into the huckleberry bushes, bounding and rolling down the hill.

Mrs. Thimbletop sped after it. She was fond of her silver hat and had no thought of losing it under a berry-bush.

But halfway down Huckleberry Hill sat the lady of whom Daisy had spoken, and it was straight to this lady's feet that the little silver thimble rolled.

She leaned to pick it up and Mrs. Thimbletop held her breath to hear her say,

'Why, here is Harriet Ann's thimble, the one I gave her when I tried to teach her to sew. It has her initials H. A. scratched inside. What a strange place to find a thimble! I thought she told me she had lost it down a crack in the floor.'

Mrs. Thimbletop hid herself behind a bush and smiled.

'This must be Cousin Drucilla,' said she to herself. 'She means to take that thimble home to Harriet Ann. Well, when she goes home I shall go too. I want my hat. I want that thimble more than Harriet Ann does, I am sure.'

Cousin Drucilla sat a long time in the huckleberry patch, or so it seemed to Mrs. Thimbletop. She sat sewing placidly until the afternoon shadows grew long. Then she gathered her sewing into a neat bundle and Mrs. Thimbletop saw her put Harriet Ann's thimble in a small leather work-box and snap the lid tightly shut.

Cousin Drucilla rose and walked slowly home, followed by Mrs. Thimbletop, who tingled with im-

patience, she did so long to have her silver thimble hat again.

'This is a day wasted,' said Mrs. Thimbletop. 'I shan't find out a thing about Dilly here unless something has happened since Grandma Reddy left. But I must have my thimble hat again.'

Mrs. Thimbletop followed Cousin Drucilla into the house and up into her bed-room. There the work-box was placed on the table and Cousin Drucilla settled herself in a chair with a book.

'I shall simply have to wait until she opens the box,' said Mrs. Thimbletop. 'I may as well go round the house, while she is reading, and see what I can see.'

Mrs. Thimbletop made a complete tour of the house, but, like Grandma Reddy, of Dilly she found not a trace.

There were many other things, however, Mrs. Thimbletop did see and hear.

Harriet Ann came home from play and sat down to an early supper which she ate alone. Harriet Ann had fallen that afternoon from an apple tree and

bumped her head. There was a great lump on her forehead as big as an egg. The bump made Harriet Ann very quiet and different from her usual self. When she had finished her supper, she went to bed.

Next, Harriet Ann's father came home on the train. He went directly out to a bed of roses, of which he was proud, and there busied himself with a great pair of shears and the hose. When he had tended the roses he went in the house and dressed himself in a fine black suit.

'He is going out to dinner,' said Mrs. Thimbletop knowingly. 'He is dressed in his best and there is no dinner cooking here. Annie is sitting on the back steps alone.'

Harriet Ann's mother was going out to dinner too. Mrs. Thimbletop knew that when she saw her,

for Harriet Ann's mother was dressed in a beautiful scarlet frock. And on the bed lay the scarlet feather fan of which Dilly had told and which she so much admired.

As Mrs. Thimbletop stood looking on, the evening breeze came in at the window and blew a little feather from out the scarlet fan. It fluttered across the bed, on to the floor, and out of the bed-room door.

Quick as a flash Mrs. Thimbletop picked up the soft little feather and hid it in the front of her dress.

'I will take it home and save it for Dilly,' said she. 'Now I had better look after Cousin Drucilla and see if she has opened her sewing-box yet.'

Cousin Drucilla, too, by this time, was dressed for dining out. She wore a black dress that shimmered and sparkled as she walked. But Cousin Drucilla had not opened the sewing-box. It was still tightly shut.

Mrs. Thimbletop hid behind the lamp on the table and eyed the work-box.

'What shall I do if Cousin Drucilla doesn't open

the work-box at all?' thought she. 'I certainly don't want to stay here all night. Grandma Reddy will worry. Yet I do want my thimble hat.'

It did seem as if Mrs. Thimbletop would have to spend the night at Harriet Ann's. Cousin Drucilla picked up a scarf and a fan and moved toward the door.

But in the doorway she halted and turned back.

'I forgot Harriet Ann's thimble,' said she. 'I will put it on her bureau where she will see it the moment she wakes up. It will be a pleasant little surprise in the morning for Harriet Ann.'

Cousin Drucilla placed the thimble on Harriet

Ann's bureau. Harriet Ann lay fast asleep in bed. Softly Cousin Drucilla tiptoed out of the room.

On the bureau Mrs. Thimbletop picked up the silver thimble. Looking in the mirror she fitted it upon her head again.

'It looks well,' murmured Mrs. Thimbletop. 'I always did like this hat.'

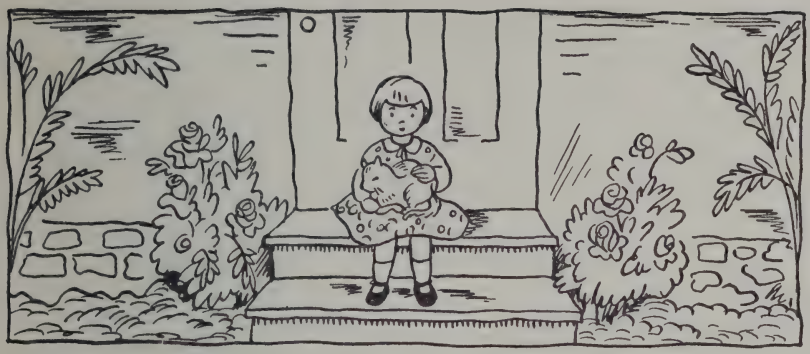
She tilted her head from side to side, smiling at her own face in the looking-glass. She even waved her hand and blew herself a tiny kiss. Mrs. Thimbletop was happy, you see, at having her silver hat again.

But at last Mrs. Thimbletop turned to go.

'Good-night, Harriet Ann,' said she, smiling at Harriet Ann's great lump and at her tousled head.

Snuggled in the bedclothes that was all you could see of Harriet Ann.

'Good-night,' repeated Mrs. Thimbletop agreeably. 'You ought to thank me for taking this thimble away. It is Cousin Drucilla who will have a surprise to-morrow morning and not you, Harriet Ann.'



## CHAPTER XII

### A LITTLE BROWN MOUSE

DEBBY sat on the playhouse door-step holding Grandma Reddy in her lap.

Debby was lonely. Rose-Marie was broken and Dilly was lost. Mother had offered to buy Debby a new doll. She meant, Debby knew, to buy a new head for Rose-Marie the very next time she went to New York. But Debby didn't feel like having a new doll. The truth was she wanted Dilly, soft, comfortable, good little Dilly. And so Debby sat lonely on the playhouse steps.

On her lap lay Grandma Reddy, purring loudly to show that she felt pleased. Debby had pulled the skirt of her dress up to cover Grandma. It was a blue dress. It looked well against Grandma Reddy's orange-yellow fur.

You may think it strange that Grandma would allow Debby to wrap anything about her or even that she would be willing to lie on Debby's lap. For Grandma Reddy was not at all that kind of a cat. Indeed you remember how she had raced with Harriet Ann and taken the great jump from the porch roof all because Harriet Ann had wanted to play she was a baby and wrap her in a shawl.

'But I am sorry for Debby,' thought Grandma Reddy, 'and I am very fond of her too. Besides, it is cool this afternoon and I feel chilly and the warmth of her skirt is good.'

So Debby and Reddy sat on the door-step, keeping one another company, and just behind them sat Mrs. Thimbletop too.

Down the garden path, walking along as bold as you please, came a little Field Mouse. He had run

away from home and his mother and was out to see the world. He was a very young Field Mouse or he would have been more wise. He would have known enough to keep his eyes wide open to see who might be about. He would have known enough to go creeping softly through the grass instead of walking out on the path for every one to see.

But at any rate down the garden path came the Field Mouse. Not far from the door-step he stopped short to view the scene.

Foolish, foolish little Field Mouse!

Sleepily Grandma Reddy opened her yellow eyes. Once she blinked, but once only. Then off Debby's lap leaped Grandma Reddy and after the Field Mouse, who almost turned a somersault in his haste to be away. After Grandma Reddy sped Debby, running as fast as she could. And after Debby sped Mrs. Thimbletop, who, at this exciting moment, had no thought of being left behind.

As was said, the Field Mouse was young and somewhat foolish. He needed his mother to tell him what to do. If only he had kept out-of-doors in the garden

he could have slipped off presently among the grass and bushes and gone safely home.

But instead of this the Field Mouse lost his head completely and scooted up the porch steps and in at the open back door. Then, more foolish still, up the stairs he ran, with Grandma close at his heels.

Into the north room, the spare room where nobody slept, darted the Field Mouse. There stood a great chest of drawers and one of the drawers was open no more than a crack. Into the drawer like a flash went the poor frightened Field Mouse. He crouched in a corner, his heart pounding, fairly gasping for breath.

Grandma Reddy, on her hind legs, was peering into the drawer. The Field Mouse from his corner could see her paws on the edge of the drawer and could note the quivering of her whiskers as her bright amber eyes stared straight in at him.

Pink had followed Debby, Pink with a broom. Of course she came slowly. Not for years had Pink been able to run.

'He is in there! The mouse is in there!' cried Debby, pointing at the drawer and hopping up and down. 'Don't let Reddy catch him! Don't!'

As Pink bent to open the drawer Debby caught Reddy in her arms and held her fast.

Reddy was angry. She struggled and squirmed.

But Debby was squeezing her round the middle and a faint kicking was the best that Reddy could do.

'Nothing but my years and my respect for Debby kept me from scratching,' Grandma Reddy later told Mrs. Thimbletop.

As it was, she couldn't keep the angry gleam from her eyes.

Pink opened the drawer and out darted the Field Mouse and away. Straight home he fled, where his heart didn't stop fluttering for a week. Or so he told all his friends who came hurrying to call to hear about his wonderful escape from the great, cruel, blood-thirsty cat.

But Debby and Pink and Mrs. Thimbletop didn't notice the mouse nor give him a single thought. And neither did Grandma Reddy after a moment or two, when her rage had died down.

There in the drawer lay Rose-Marie with the crack in her forehead, the great piece out of her rosy cheek, and another out of her dimpled chin, just where Mother had placed her after her dreadful fall.

A sad enough sight, to be sure. But no one was

thinking of that. For beside Rose-Marie, tucked cosily under her arm, lay Dilly. Yes, Dilly. Believe it or not, it was Dilly.

How she came there no one could guess. Not Debby, nor Mother, nor Aunt Deborah, nor Pink. Not Grandma Reddy, nor even Mrs. Thimbletop.

Dilly's dress was covered with mud and badly torn. Her shoes were very much the worse for wear. Her hair stood out straight all round her head. It was plain to be seen it could never be made to lie down as it should. Dilly's face, too, showed what she had been through. To speak frankly, Dilly's face was not very clean. Her smile was as sweet, her eyes as good and true. But no one who saw her doubted

that something must be done for Dilly and that right soon.

'Why, of course,' said Mother, after scarcely a moment's thought, 'I know what to do. I will paint a new face for Dilly. And she shall have a new wig and new clothes, all through, and a new pair of slippers too.'

'Will you make her look like Dilly?' asked Debby, holding the dirty Little Rag Doll tight in her arms. 'I want her to look just the same, you know.'

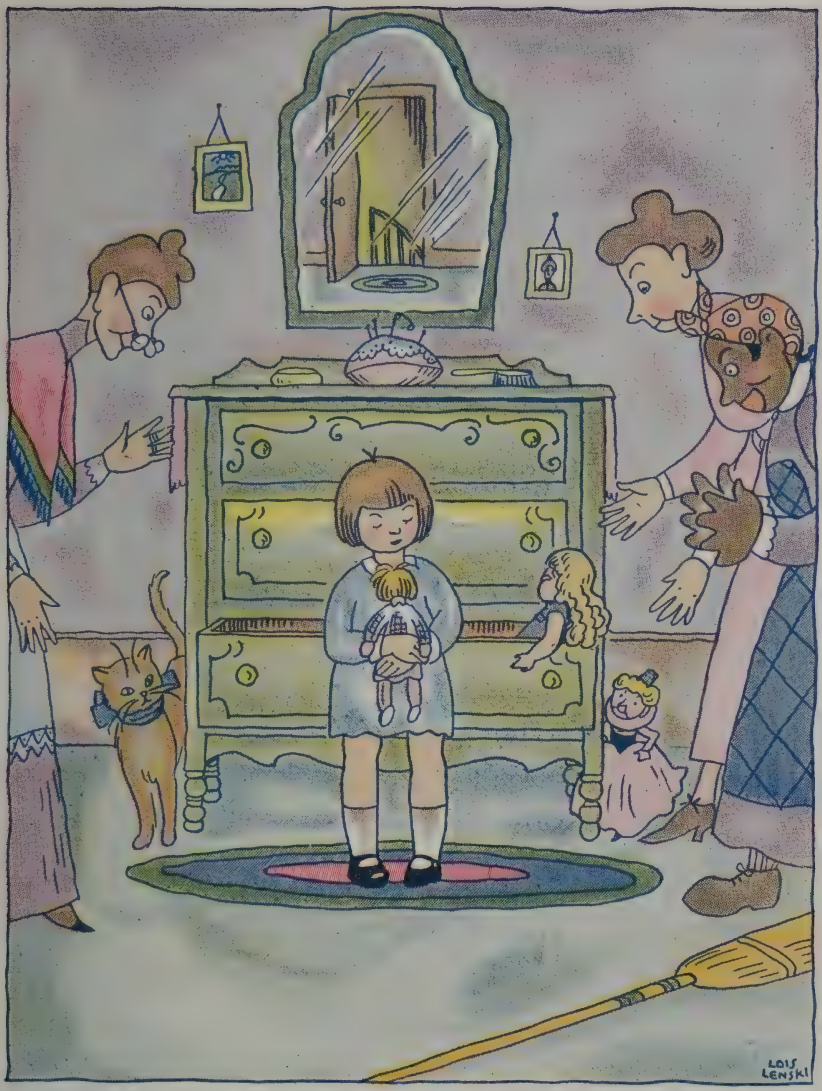
'Yes,' answered Mother, 'I will do my best to make her look just the same.'

'Then you may have her,' said Debby to Mother, but first giving the dirty face a tender kiss.

There was great rejoicing in the playhouse the day that Dilly came home. Rose-Marie was there too, with a new head from New York, which was quite as beautiful as her Paris face, they all agreed.

But Dilly was the loveliest of them all. There was no doubt in any one's mind about that.

In the first place Mother had made her look




Believe it or not, it was Dilly

exactly like the old Dilly. That is, she still had honest, faithful blue eyes and the sweetest smile in

the world. But her eyes were not anxious any more. They didn't look as if they were afraid of what might happen next. They were bright and gay and full of fun. Dilly's lips were cherry-red, and her cheeks were coral-pink, and her hair fell in lovely yellow waves about her face.

She wore the prettiest dress. It was exactly like Debby's dress that she wore the day she went to Madame Fair's, even to the two pockets, both very deep. Indeed it was made from a piece left from

Debby's frock. Her socks were snowy-white and on her feet were a pair of bright red slippers with straps that crossed. Debby loved those slippers.

But, best of all, upon her head she wore a sun-bonnet. It was made by Madame Fair herself to fit Dilly's head. It was fashioned of shiny gold-and-white silk, just like the sun-bonnet needle-books but with the needle-book left out. Madame Fair, you remember, helped hunt for Dilly. And when Dilly was found Madame Fair was so pleased that she made her a sun-bonnet just to fit. But what pleased Dilly most about the sun-bonnet was the feather, a knowing little scarlet feather fastened on the side. You know where it came from. From Harriet Ann's mother's scarlet feather fan. Mrs. Thimbletop had brought it home, and the day that Madame Fair came to try Dilly's bonnet on she let it blow across the floor where Debby would see it and be sure to ask to have it used. Which Debby did.

So Dilly was lovely to look at. But, of course, the loveliest thing about her still were her faithful, honest eyes and her cheerful, sweet smile.

Debby had a good play that afternoon with her dolls. They all enjoyed it, every one.

But when she had gone home to tea and the red evening sun had turned the playhouse windows into a rosy glow they gathered about Dilly to hear her story and to learn where she had been. They were all there sitting in front of Dilly, Mrs. Thimbletop and Grandma Reddy and Rose-Marie.

'I was in the drawer with Rose-Marie all the while,' said Dilly. 'When you left me alone under the lilac bush I knew I couldn't stay here. I was afraid of Harriet Ann. I knew I wouldn't have a moment's

peace. But she would never know me now, do you think?'

'Never,' answered Mrs. Thimbletop and Grandma Reddy and Rose-Marie.

'I crept up the garden path,' went on Dilly, 'and into the house. The family were at dinner, and Pink, in the kitchen, was giving Grandma Reddy a piece of fish. There was no one about upstairs so I wandered round and into the north room. I didn't know where to hide and I was wondering what to do next when I heard some one crying in the lower dresser drawer, so of course I went over and looked inside.

'It was Rose-Marie,' said Dilly, smiling up at the big, handsome doll who smiled and nodded back, 'and Rose-Marie was very unhappy. Weren't you, Rose-Marie?'

'Indeed I was,' replied Rose-Marie, shaking her head until her ear-rings tinkled. 'I felt dreadfully, of course, because of my broken head. I was afraid, too, that I would be forgotten there in the drawer, that no one would come to me again, perhaps not for years. Besides that I felt badly because I had been

so cross and rude to you people in the playhouse and to Dilly most of all. But Dilly didn't remember that, she said. She crept in the drawer beside me and she stayed with me and she talked to me. And I love Dilly,' ended Rose-Marie in a burst. 'I love Dilly, I do.'

'We all love Dilly,' said Mrs. Thimbletop with one of her sharp little nods. 'It was just like her to do what she did. I am not surprised in the least.'

'Now that you have a New York head instead of a Paris one, do you think you will be different?' asked Reddy slyly. She simply could not forget that Rose-Marie had called her 'Kitty' and 'Puss.'

'I hope so, Grandma Reddy,' answered Rose-Marie, in such a humble voice that Reddy looked a trifle ashamed. 'At least I mean to try.'

'Now, Grandma Reddy,' interrupted sensible Mrs. Thimbletop, who wanted everything to be pleasant upon this happy day, 'tell them what happened to you the day you went to Harriet Ann's. And when you finish I will tell what happened to me.'

Grandma Reddy told her story gladly, making a

great deal of the high jump she had taken from Harriet Ann's porch roof. She purred loudly and rubbed her nose with pleasure at the words of praise given her by Dilly and Rose-Marie.

Mrs. Thimbletop then told her adventures. She ended by saying something that almost took their breath away.

'I may as well tell you right now,' said Mrs. Thimbletop, 'that I am going away for a little visit. I feel I need a change. It is not very far from here and I shall be in to see you often. I am going to visit Harriet Ann.'

'No!' exclaimed Grandma Reddy, sitting up with a start. 'Whatever for?'

'Well,' explained Mrs. Thimbletop earnestly, 'I have been over at Harriet Ann's quite a little lately, and I have found out that Cousin Drucilla is going to try again to teach her to sew. She has bought Harriet Ann a doll named Molly and they are going to make her a set of clothes. Now I want to be on hand to lend Harriet Ann this thimble.' Here Mrs. Thimbletop put her hand to her head and lovingly smoothed the

edge of her hat. 'I shall have it out on the edge of the bureau every sewing-time, and when the lesson is over I shall take it away. Of course I mean to wear it in between times. All this will be a help to Cousin Drucilla, it will be good for Harriet Ann, and it will suit me nicely.'

Mrs. Thimbletop looked round at her friends, but no one seemed able to speak. This did not trouble Mrs. Thimbletop. Indeed it made her smile.

'Then, too, I want to look out for Molly,' went on Mrs. Thimbletop cheerfully, 'to see that she is well treated. And last of all I am going because I like Harriet Ann.'

'So do I,' said Dilly heartily, nodding her curly head. 'You know I always said she simply wasn't fitted to have a doll, that was why she treated me so. And now you will fit her, Mrs. Thimbletop. I know you will.'

'I hope so,' answered Mrs. Thimbletop, 'for her sake and for Molly's too.'

'But you will come back often to see us, won't you?' asked Dilly. 'Will you come every day?'

'Yes, do,' said Grandma Reddy. 'I shall be here, you know. I have made up my mind to live at Debby's. I find it a very pleasant home.'

'What good times we shall have here together in the playhouse,' said Dilly, clapping her hands, 'you, Grandma Reddy, and Mrs. Thimbletop, and Debby, and Rose-Marie. I think I am the happiest doll ever made.'

'You are the best doll, that I know,' answered Mrs. Thimbletop sharply. 'I really think, Dilly, that you are the best and the dearest Little Rag Doll in the world.'

THE END

# Little Rag Doll

by

ETHEL CALVERT PHILLIPS

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